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Your iPod, Your Way



iHome's iH36 and iH5
let you listen to your iPod
whenever, wherever.
Find out more on page 64!



October 2006
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HDTV On A Budget

Tips On Buying The Perfect Family PC

Best TVs For Watching Football



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PARKING

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Lifestyle Close-Up: Our Favorite Budget Buys

Most of us don't have the luxury of a bottomless checking account, and we want to make sure we get the most out of our hard-earned money. Still, we like to think of purchases as investments, so the quality is paramount, too. In this month's issue of *First Glimpse*, we cover the most budget-friendly CE devices—from little USB flash drives to big, beautiful plasma HDTVs—that you can find on today's market. Happy shopping!

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Cover Story

64 At Home With iHome

These iPod Accessories Pump Up Your Player's Power

On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the iHome iH5 (\$99.95; www.ihomeaudio.com) and iHome iH36 (\$99.95).

Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *First Glimpse*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

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Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

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CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

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A Monitoring System

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Tunes In Every Room

CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.

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Editor's Note

A few weeks ago, during a family get-together, my young niece, Anna, asked to use her Aunt Julie's camera to snap a few photos. Julie agreed—kids love cameras, and besides, her point-and-shoot is an older model anyway. Imagine the collective gasp when Anna came strutting out proudly with Julie's brand-new, \$1,000 Canon Digital Rebel XT D-SLR hanging from a strap around her neck!

What struck me more, though, was that Anna seemed perfectly comfortable using this fairly complicated camera. She had taken the lens cap off, turned the camera on, and shot a few photos before we realized she had it. That's pretty impressive for an 8-year-old. What better way to encourage our little budding photographer than buy her a camera of her own?

Of course, buying a kid a \$1,000 *anything* isn't the best idea, but that's where this issue of *First Glimpse* will come in handy. This month, we scoured the CE world to give you our favorite budget buys, from MP3 players and HDTVs to laptop bags and digital cameras. We didn't focus merely on what was

the least expensive; to us, "budget" means something that combines quality with value, so you can get the most from every dollar you spend. Sure, I wouldn't give Anna a \$1,000 camera, but I wouldn't buy her a cheapie plastic one either. There are happy mediums for everything, and we've found them all.

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer

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Communication.
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Mio DigiWalker™ C710

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C310



C710



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First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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Special Product Section



iHome iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

MSRP: \$99.95

www.ihomeaudio.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



**iHome iH30
(iPod Boom Box)**
MSRP: \$149.99
www.ihomeaudio.com



Move & Groove To Your iPod

iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

iHome is ready to outfit spaces of any size with one of its most advanced offerings to date, the iH36. The unit fits snugly under a cabinet and has a host of features including: rich, powerful sound; the ability to charge and play all iPods; FM, TV and Weather channels; timer; remote control; and a three-line display that shows song title and track number.

iH30 (iPod Boom Box)

With its big sound that won't hurt your wallet, the iH30 is the ultimate boom box for your iPod. Featuring 4-inch speakers that emit powerful sound; a car adaptor that lets you use it on the road; and a battery option for portable use, the iH30 is perfect for the beach, the boardwalk, or the bedroom.



iHome iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

MSRP: \$99.95

www.ihomeaudio.com

iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

With its sleek design, protective carrying case, and host of features, the iH26 is the ultimate portable alarm clock for your iPod. Its built-in docks allow you to charge both the iPod and iPod shuffle simultaneously. Perfect for business trips, camping, picnics, or any family getaway, the iH26 brings high quality sound and alarm features wherever you go!

iHome™
the home system for your iPod®

FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section

JBL Venue™ Series

MSRP: From \$189 (price varies by model)

www.jbl.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



STEAL THE SHOW.
GO PRO.



JBL'S NEWEST SHOW-STEALER

From Vitaphone to THX®, from hi-fi to Dolby® Digital, from Woodstock '69 to Cream '05, JBL® loudspeakers have been stealing the show in the world of professional audio for more than 60 years. Now JBL is set to steal the show at one of the most challenging and exciting venues of all: your home. The timing couldn't be better. Flat-panel TV sales are expected to double in the next year, and high-quality audio should be part of every system.

Did You Know?

All HDTV programming is broadcast in Dolby® Digital sound. AND

All DVD players, most gaming systems, and most cable and satellite programs deliver multichannel sound.

But to experience the full impact of these advanced entertainment choices, you'll need to connect your new TV to a quality surround sound system. The new Venue™ Series brings JBL's legendary Pro Sound home, with powerful, accurate sound for movies, music, video games, and sports. Venue systems are built to play loud and long, delivering the kind of clean, distortion-free performance that professionals insist on—and that you'll quickly realize you can't live without. Go ahead, ask for a demonstration now!

Show-Stealing Venue Technologies

Many JBL consumer loudspeakers feature advanced technologies derived directly from JBL Professional equipment, and the affordable new Venue systems are a notable example.

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Special Product Section

Titanium-Laminate Dome Tweeters

Reproducing high frequencies accurately at high listening levels requires transducer domes that are extremely light, fast, and rigid. Titanium is all of those things, and JBL pioneered its use in professional loudspeakers. Venue's titanium-laminate domes reduce distortion and ear fatigue for a more enjoyable listening experience at any volume.

EOS (Elliptical Oblate Spheroidal™) Waveguides

Developed originally for JBL Pro LSR studio monitors, EOS waveguides evenly disperse clean, high-frequency sound more precisely across a wider listening area, filling the whole room with audible entertainment. So Venue's "sweet spot" is wherever listeners feel most comfortable.

Polyplas™ Reinforcement

Stiffer woofer cones deliver more uniform motion, eliminating internal resonance to prevent annoying "sloppy bass." Rich, accurate low-frequency response is essential in reproducing movies, music, and sports realistically, and Venue delivers brilliantly.

JBL Invites You To Share The Excitement

Get your own demonstration of the difference Venue can make and then do the only logical thing: Steal the show.

There's A Venue System For Every Venue

Interested in a home theater with dramatic, full-spectrum movie sound and crisp, distinct dialogue? Try Venue. How about your own personal concert hall, one that features music that's reproduced with all the subtleties of the original performance? Venue can do that, too. Looking for a home sports stadium, with action that gives new meaning to "up close and personal"? Again, Venue's the way to go.

Any Venue system is versatile enough to accurately reproduce even the most dynamic digital sources with utter fidelity and disperse all that great sound cleanly throughout the listening space.

With a choice of bookshelf, wall-mountable, and floor-standing systems, there's a Venue system that's ideal for any budget, any décor, and any taste in home entertainment.

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JVC's Everio G Series: GZ-MG37US & GZ-MG505US

MSRP: \$799 (GZ-MG37US); \$1,299 (GZ-MG505US)

www.jvc.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



No Tape. No Disc. It's Hard Disk Drive.

Everio is designed to eliminate any worries you might have when you're using your camcorder. Just keep on shooting, because the built-in large capacity hard drive easily stores hours and hours of your video inside a lightweight compact camcorder. You can also shoot thousands of digital still images, so whether you're at home or on-the-go, you'll always be ready to record or play back your memories.

Advantages Of A Hard Disk Camcorder:

- The longest recording times with the large capacity built-in hard drive, so you can shoot hours of video. Now you can
- record events such as vacations, soccer games, and more without worry.
- No cost for or need to buy additional recording media. No tape or disc is required. The Everio G Series provides an all-in-one solution, ensuring no interruption during long time recordings, so you won't miss a moment. No media to lose!
- Direct access to scenes you want. No need to fast forward or rewind. Just click the thumbnail image and watch your memories come to life. Makes sifting through hours and hours of accumulated footage a breeze.

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Special Product Section



- No risk of erasing previous recordings by mistake. You won't ever record over those once-in-a-lifetime events. Recording starts automatically from the blank space on the disk.
- Easy deletion of unwanted scenes. So you don't have to worry about getting it right the first time, safely select and erase entire scenes in an instant to free up disk space.
- Simple editing is made possible inside the camera, or you can create a detailed masterpiece with the included CyberLink editing software.
- With the optional Share Station CU-VD10 (\$199), you can create a DVD of your memories directly from your Everio* camcorder, skipping the PC.

*(GZ-MG27, GZ-MG37, GZ-MG77, GZ-MG505)

JVC
The Perfect Experience

Klipsch iGroove HG

MSRP: \$249.99

www.klipsch.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Turn Your iPod® Into An Entertainment System

Born to rock any room, the iGroove HG is a convenient all-in-one digital music system that delivers audiophile-quality sound everywhere you need it. With its stunning high-gloss black finish and class-leading technology, this dynamic performer turns iPods and MP3 players into high-style, high-performance entertainment systems.

The iGroove HG works not only with iPod, but with most all MP3 player brands, as well as any gadget that has an audio out or headphone jack utilizing a standard miniplug, including cell phones, gaming machines, and portable satellite radios. All third- and fourth-generation dockable iPods dock into the unit for charging. Special iPod mini and nano adaptors come with the system for secure docking, while the shuffle and other devices connect via the included universal J-cup adaptor.

A true two-way system, the iGroove HG gets its dynamic soul courtesy of dual 2.5-inch woofers in a ported enclosure, premium crossover networks, and dual 1-inch MicroTractrix

horn-loaded tweeters. The iGroove HG is the only speaker system in this category utilizing horn technology, a highly efficient design that reproduces genuine, lifelike sound.

In addition to easily filling a room with smooth, crisp sound, the iGroove HG is also extremely simple to operate. All you have to do is plug it in, pop in an iPod, and press play. The included IR (infrared) handheld remote handles full system control, while the integrated handle makes toting it around a breeze. So, are you ready to get your iGroove on?



Griffin iTrip nano

MSRP: \$49.99

www.griffintechnology.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



The FM Transmitter For Your iPod nano

With Griffin Technology's iTrip, you can now use the iPod's high-resolution LCD to clearly view station information. Additionally, the sled design and minimalist controls make this the thinnest FM transmitter for the slimmest iPod to date.

iPod nano slides into iTrip and securely connects via the iPod's dock and headphone connectors. iTrip accomplishes all this without adding bulk to the slim, sexy iPod nano. To stay securely attached, it features Griffin's patented micro grip technology, which uses microscopic material to provide a secure grip without ever losing its holding properties.

iTrip's innovative selectable mono or stereo modes allow you to adjust for the absolute best possible reception under real-world conditions.

Keeping your music broadcasting is no problem. iTrip draws the little power it needs directly from iPod nano, requiring no batteries or AC adapters. A built-in USB port allows iPod nano to charge or synchronize music.

Perfect to use in your car or at home.

GRIFFIN



Altec Lansing iM Motion iM11

MSRP: \$99.95

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Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Portable Sound For A Compact Budget

This is the system that will get you started. The inMotion iM11 lets you listen to music on your iPod with robust sound while you're on the go. Fits, syncs, and charges your iPod, photo iPod, iPod mini, and iPod nano players.

Sound

An amplified extension of your iPod, the inMotion iM11 lets you throw your headphones by the wayside and delivers high quality, crystal-clear sound whenever and wherever you are.

Mobile

The compact, lightweight speaker system that goes just about anywhere you want to listen to music.

Made For:

- iPods with a color display
- iPod nano

- iPod mini
- iPod with dock connector

Charged

The inMotion iM11 automatically recharges your iPod when plugged in and docked.

Unplugged

The inMotion iM11's long battery life gives you complete freedom.


ALTEC LANSING®
inMotion™
PORTABLE AUDIO

**NETGEAR RangeMax NEXT
Wireless Router**
MSRP: \$129.99
www.netgear.com
Available at select Best Buy™
stores and www.bestbuy.com



Extend The Possibilities Of Your Wireless Home

What is RangeMax NEXT? It's a router that extends the possibilities of your wireless home network by providing a steady stream of up to 270Mbps, and is compliant with draft 802.11n. This next-generation wireless standard utilizes advanced MIMO (Multi-In, Multi-Out) technology, which delivers incredible speed and range and, for the first time, provides wireless interoperability at the highest speeds with other products with Intensi-fi™.

A RangeMax NEXT wireless network creates and maintains stable connections and enough bandwidth to surf the Internet, download MP3s, make Internet phone calls, share files, play network games, and stream high-definition videos, simultaneously at any distance or location in the home or office. Because RangeMax NEXT is compatible with all legacy b and g wireless products, you are sure to be connected.

Preset internal antennas and draft 11n-True-Test high-performance testing and tuning, provides maximum performance and high-quality streaming every time. Setup is simple thanks to NETGEAR's Smart Wizard and 24/7 technical support.

NETGEAR®

Mobile Edge Signature Tote

MSRP: \$99.99

www.mobileedge.com



The Best Laptop Tote Ever

The stylish Signature Tote is the latest addition to the Mobile Edge Tote Collection. Incorporating over four years of actual user input, Mobile Edge feels this is the best computer tote it's ever offered.

Designer styling, highlighted by stainless steel buckles and accent straps with contrasting stitching, the Signature Tote is the most well appointed notebook tote on the market. Choose from the tan and black Mobile Edge insignia pattern or sleek black faux croc.

Beyond the Signature Tote's impressive exterior lies all the technology you need, including Mobile Edge's Exclusive

Wireless Security Shield to insulate your cell phone and PDA from hackers, dedicated SafetyCell Computer Protection Compartment, a detachable cell phone pouch, and a removable matching wristlet to carry your necessities for social occasions.

MOBILEEDGE
Bring It On.

Jabra BT800: Bluetooth Wireless Headset

MSRP: \$129.99

www.jabra.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Familiar & Intuitive

With the Jabra BT800 your phone becomes the accessory! Your mobile phone's functions and operations are simply mirrored on the headset, giving you an immediate feeling of familiarity. It's innovative, yet intuitively simple to use.

Function At Your Fingertips

All the features and operations you're so familiar with on your mobile are now available from the headset itself. Using just four controls—the mute button, jog wheel, Answer button, and End button—accessing the functionality you need is easy and natural. For example, the jog wheel, which you can use for scrolling through menu functions in Standby mode, becomes the volume control during a call. Soon it'll be second nature to use it.

Blue Backlit Screen

Unique to the BT800 is the blue backlit LCD, which displays caller ID on incoming calls so you know who's calling—no need to look at your phone. You can also use it to view the phone's call list and menu options.

DSP (Digital Signal Processing)

The BT800's unique DSP means that, whatever the environment, you are assured of optimum audio quality. DSP's automatic volume control compensates for noisy surroundings by increasing the listening level accordingly, and noise-cancellation technology means that the incoming caller can hear you more clearly.

Vibrate Alert Or Favorite Ring Tone

The BT800's call vibrate/ring tone option enables you to select your favorite ring tone from the headset itself. Or if you prefer, simply set the BT800 to Vibrate Only, so you silently know when a call is coming through.

Jabra

open

ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH



Supersized Panasonic Plasma To Hit Market Before Holidays

Unveiled back in January, Panasonic's 103-inch HD plasma TV will be available to consumers before Christmas, according to the company.

The TH-103PZ600U, with a price tag of \$69,999.99, boasts a contrast ratio of 4,000:1 and a resolution of

1,920 x 1,080. The set, which is equivalent in size to four 50-inch Panasonic plasma displays, has a display area of 89.3 x 50.2 inches.

Each TH-103PZ600U is built to order and requires professional installation because of its size and weight.

And despite the price, it'll have only a three-year limited warranty.

The 103-inch model is the newest member of Panasonic's line of plasma TVs. The 65-inch model, the TH-65PX600U (\$9,999.95), began shipping in September.

Microsoft To Challenge Apple iPod With Zune Players

Microsoft has been somewhat tight-lipped about the details, but the software giant has confirmed that it is developing digital music players and software under the Zune brand name.



According to Microsoft marketing executive Chris Stephenson, the Zune line will debut in time for holiday shopping. The first Zune player will have a 30GB hard drive and Wi-Fi capabilities, and it'll cost \$299. Stephenson hinted to *Billboard* magazine that owners of Zune players will be able to wirelessly share music with future Zune devices, computers, smartphones, and, of course, the Xbox 360.

Repository For Medical Records

Management of your personal health information can be daunting, even if you don't have anything seriously wrong with you. Just think of the number of doctors you've seen over the years and imagine what a chore it would be to round up hard copies of all of that information. The portal service known as myNDMA (National Digital Medical Archive; www.ndma.us) provides free, subscription-based storage for all of your personal medical records, information, and images (including X-rays).

As part of the service, you'll have unlimited space on a secure server, and you'll be able to decide with whom you wish to share some or all of your digitized medical information. At the myNDMA site, you'll also be able to search for additional studies, articles, and information pertinent to any specific medical issues you're dealing with.

Martha Stewart, Kodak Make "Picture-Perfect Match"

It's a match made in photography heaven. Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia and Eastman Kodak have agreed to a multiyear partnership to produce a line of Martha Stewart-branded personalized photo products. The new items, which include cards, photo books, calendars, stationery, and invitations, debut in late September at www.kodakgallery.com and www.marthastewart.com. More products will be introduced before the holidays and in early 2007.

"This partnership of Martha Stewart's iconic design sense and Kodak's position as the No. 1 brand in consumer photography is a picture-perfect match," says Kodak's Sandra Morris, general manager of Consumer Digital Imaging Services.

Martha Stewart with Kodak Chairman and CEO Antonio Perez.



Women Account For 65% Of Cell Phone Game Revenue

Female cell phone service subscribers account for 65% of revenue generated by sales of games for phones, and they account for 72% of revenue in the most popular game category—puzzles and strategy games—according to the most recent Mobile Game Report from research firm Telephia (www.telephia.com).

“The casual nature of mobile games provides tremendous appeal to women, who are not traditionally hardcore gamers by console or online gaming standards,” says Kanishka Agarwal, Telephia’s vice president of new products.

Based on revenue share, Tetris and Tetris Deluxe, both from EA Mobile, are the best-selling games for cell phones.

Cell Phone Game Sales' Revenue By Category, Gender

Game Category	Revenue Share	Male Share	Female Share
Puzzle/Strategy	33.8%	28%	72%
Card/Casino	18.3%	34%	66%
Sports/Racing	12.9%	39%	61%
Action/Adventure	12.8%	60%	40%
Trivia/Word	11.4%	26%	74%
Classic/Arcade	10.8%	38%	62%

Source: Telephia

Verizon Tops Telecommunications Firms In Online Service, Survey Says

The Customer Respect Group (www.customerrespect.com), a research firm that studies how companies treat their online customers, asked customers to judge companies in six areas that fall under the categories of site usability, communication, and trust. Fifty-five companies from the wireless, cable, telecommunications, and MVNO (mobile virtual network operators) sectors were included in the survey, with the Top 10 below. Each company was assigned a CRI (Customer Respect Index) score; a score of more than 7.0 is excellent, scores of 6.25 to 6.99 are good, and scores of 5.7 to 6.24 are above average.

Top 10 Telecommunications Firms

Rank	Company	Industry Sector	CRI
1.	Verizon Wireless	Wireless/Mobile	8.5
2.	CenturyTel	Telco	8.2
3.	T-Mobile	Wireless/Mobile	7.1
4.	Sprint	Telco	7.0
5.	Qwest	Telco	6.8
6.	Verizon Communications	Telco	6.6
7.	AT&T	Telco	6.4
	STi Mobile	MVNO	6.4
9.	Cablevision	Cable	6.3
10.	Virgin Mobile	MVNO	6.2

Source: The Customer Respect Group

tidbits

Consumers spent more than \$865 million on CE products in the week leading up to **Mother's Day** and \$873 million on CE products in the week leading up to **Father's Day**.

Source: The NPD Group

15% of videos and/or DVDs viewed at home are obtained from subscription services such as Netflix, compared to 47% from **rental stores** and 8% from pay-per-view and video-on-demand services.

Source: NPD VideoWatch

28% of Americans (age 12 and up) **own a digital music player**—up from 12% in 2005.

Source: Solutions Research Group

Nearly 40% of TV owners surveyed say they plan to **buy a new TV** within the next 12 months, with 15% leaning toward an LCD and 12% toward plasma.

Source: The NPD Group

The number of **cell phones** sold with removable media slots increased from 567,000 in Q2 2005 to 2 million in Q1 2006.

Source: The NPD Group

Smartphones account for about 10% of the cell phone market and are expected to represent 25% of the **global market** in five years.

Source: In-Stat

open

outfit your life

Accessories With Style

Boo.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



Nike Air Zoom Plus with iPod Sport Kit

\$100 (shoes), \$29 (kit) • niketown.nike.com

Behold the dawn of the digital clothing age. Nike says “Tune your run” with these Air Zooms, which can be equipped with digital sensors from the optional iPod Sport Kit. The sensors measure your activity and wirelessly send information about your workout status to your iPod nano. It’s the next best thing to sending your shoes out for a run without you.



iAttire Costumes for iPod

\$39.99 • www.iattire.net

OK, let’s just say it: There is simply no practical purpose for these iPod costumes. In fact, they make pet costumes look like the summit of human logic. But it’s Halloween, and we’re suckers. And look, we’re not saying you have any illegal tracks tucked away in your shuffle rotation, but we still can’t resist noting the potential irony in dressing your MP3 player up like a pirate.



Soleil April Laptop Bag

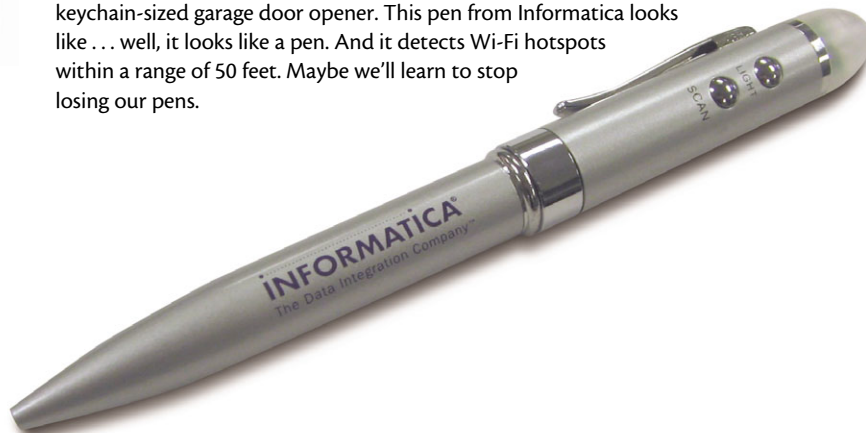
\$99.99 • www.eradian.com

We think the April is perfect for October. Featuring a plaid fabric body, brown leather handles, and metal feet for stability, this laptop bag from Radian Technologies uses a trademarked air gel system for padding. Interior pockets make room for your phone, pens, and whatever else you carry with your laptop on a crisp autumn day.

Informatica Wi-Fi Pen

\$18.95 • informatica.shopwprintit.com

We’ve been waiting for a good, practical Wi-Fi detector that doesn’t look like a keychain-sized garage door opener. This pen from Informatica looks like . . . well, it looks like a pen. And it detects Wi-Fi hotspots within a range of 50 feet. Maybe we’ll learn to stop losing our pens.





Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.

His . . .

After searching the real estate market for months, touring a handful of houses, and shaking hands with more than my fair share of smarmy real estate agents, I'd like to think I've developed an experienced eye for evaluating each room for its CE potential. Is there enough room in the kitchen for an under-cabinet LCD TV? Will a wireless router's signal reach my laptop in the upstairs living room if I want an office in the basement? And, most importantly, is the family room large enough to warrant a significant upgrade to my surround sound system?

But until I had a chance to use Toshiba's SD-P2800 (\$399.99; www.toshiba.com), a portable DVD player with a 9-inch widescreen LCD, I naively evaluated each room's entertainment possibilities. My inner movie buff had previously rejected portable DVD players as mere tools to keep antsy children placated in the back of a minivan. It took Toshiba's player to open my eyes.

I've always taken a cautious approach to keeping CE devices in the kitchen: The last thing I want is to drop my iPod in a skillet of sizzling steak fajita meat to caramelize alongside onions and green peppers. But the SD-P2800's large screen let me place the device at a safe distance from culinary conundrums without sacrificing image detail. I could pick out strands of hair, bread crumbs, and small bits of rubble in "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" from 3 feet away; the movie was still enjoyable up to about 8 feet away, but I wouldn't recommend distances farther than that for viewing.

Aside from the advantage of being able to take my movies anywhere, I thought the SD-P2800 impressively handled fast-paced action sequences. The DVD player displayed intense lightsaber battles in "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith" without any streaking. Even without progressive scan, it should be very friendly toward other action movies.

I had hoped the SD-P2800's built-in media card reader (with support for SD, xD, MMC, and MS media) would make it a vacationing essential for previewing digicam pictures on a larger screen. However, the screen's 800 x 480 resolution, while suitable for DVDs, short-changes digital photos. The color contrast was poor, and the sheer reduction of total pixels in an image was shock to my eyes.

Although the built-in speakers were loud enough for a quiet room, I'd recommend a pair of headphones if you want to use the SD-P2800 to pass the time on a cross-country trip down I-35. I liked that the player's dual headphone jacks let me share portable matinees with a guest.

I enjoyed watching DVDs in the room of my choice, but the \$400 I'd spend on the SD-P2800 nearly pays for a new HD DVD player. On the other hand, if mobile movies are a must-have, I think you'd be hard pressed to find a better portable DVD player. **FG**

BY VINCE COGLEY



& Hers CE

I've learned that strapping a child into a car seat doesn't necessarily mean that she will stay there. Case in point: I had to take my niece Danica—aka "The Car Seat Houdini"—home from a visit to Aunt Trista's house recently. No matter how tightly I pulled the straps or how many books I gave her to read, Danica always managed to get at least one body part in the passenger side front seat before I could pull over.

Unfortunately, I don't own a very kid-friendly car (no dual-sliding doors, no built-in LCDs for watching movies, no underfloor storage to hide fun toys, etc.). But this month, I was prepared for The Car Seat Houdini because I got my hands on Toshiba's SD-P2800 portable DVD player (and my husband helped out by driving, too). What's better than a 3-year-old staying in her car seat because she can watch "Dora The Explorer" in the car on a portable DVD player's 9-inch screen?

Not much. But actually getting to the point where Danica would watch "Dora" on the SD-P2800 proved difficult. At first, I set the player on her car seat's travel tray; I thought at 2.65 pounds the player would be heavy enough to stay put and keep my niece from pushing it to the floor. I was wrong. The portable player did prove durable, though, surviving the fall and continuing to function properly for the rest of the day. The SD-P2800's closed-clamshell design protected the screen, and its large base eventually helped me balance the player on my knees when I moved to the backseat to watch "Dora" with Danica.

With the SD-P2800 balanced on my knees and turned toward Danica, I could still see the show; however, the colors at this 170-degree viewing angle, especially blacks, were a bit dim. And even though the colors didn't distract my niece like they did me, the headphones did. The player has two headphone output jacks so that we could both have our own set of headphones, but Danica didn't want to wear hers. I preferred the 3D virtual surround sound the player provides via headphones because I could keep the volume at a lower level and still hear the show clearly. But Danica seemed to revel in the distorted sound of the show when she cranked the volume to its highest level.

When we finally arrived at my house, The Car Seat Houdini wanted to continue watching "Dora The Explorer" on Toshiba's SD-P2800 portable DVD player in the car, in my front yard, in the kitchen, in my bedroom, and anywhere I was willing to follow her with the player. (We did have to plug in the player when we were in the house because I only got about four hours of viewing time with the player's battery pack.) At the end of the day, Danica had the right idea: Toting the SD-P2800 anywhere you want is a good way to find fun places to watch movies or simply pass the time during a long car ride. **FG**

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Toshiba SD-P2800
\$399.99
www.toshiba.com



Fab Four

Just in time for Halloween, our October Fab Four includes an old-fashioned favorite masquerading in new clothes, a sweet little MP3 player full of lots of tricks and treats, a smartphone wearing many (many) hats, and a camera that is dressed to impress. This month we've gathered the best and newest devices from the affordable and practical (FlashDiscs for only \$5 each) to the powerful and professional (Palm Treo 700p) so that you can usher in the fall season with something just right.

digital camera



digital camera

Why: We loved the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T30—and its new-and-improved cousin, the DSC-T10, promises to leave us just as smitten. Although we know, of course, that looks aren't everything, this ultra-compact 7MP digicam is just so *pretty*. The tasteful design of the DSC-T10 (released in August) was no accident; Sony designed the camera to appeal to consumers who want not only a top-rate product, but also an eye-catching "accessory." It's available in four colors—pink, white, black, and silver—and is thin (about 8/10 of an inch thick) and lightweight (5.82 ounces with battery and Memory Stick). The DSC-T10 backs up its chic style with the real goods—a 2.5-inch LCD screen, 3X optical zoom, anti-blur and low-light compensation technology, and 56MB of internal memory. Optional Memory Sticks offer up to 4GB of additional storage capacity.

Bottom line: It makes you—and your photos—look good.

mp3 player



mp3 player

Why: Released in August, the Creative Zen V Plus is a pocket-sized powerhouse. This little flash player has a 1.5-inch color display, FM radio, a voice recorder, and an alarm clock. It's compatible with all major online music subscription services including Yahoo! Music Unlimited, Urge, Napster To Go, and Audible.com. Or, if you'd prefer to skip the subscription route and just transfer a couple thousand of your songs directly from CD (or tape or album) to your Zen V Plus, go for it. With the line-in jack, you can take your PC completely out of the loop. For true audiophiles who like their songs' settings to be just right, there are eight EQ (equalizer) settings built-in: acoustic, classical, disco, jazz, new age, pop, rock, and vocal. Weighing less than 2 ounces, the Zen V Plus offers 15 hours of continuous playback time, the ability to sync with Microsoft Outlook's Contacts, Calendar, and Tasks features, and five scratch-proof color combinations.

Bottom Line: Powerful, portable, and cute as a button.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

phone



Palm Treo 700p

• \$649.99 • www.palm.com/us
• www.sprint.com

phone

Why: The Palm Treo is the first smart-phone running the Palm OS to take advantage of the super high-speed EVDO (Evolution Data Optimized) network. Designed to meet the needs of power users—those of us who rely on our handhelds for constant wireless access for both business and personal use—the Treo 700p offers all of the mobile phone capabilities we'd expect, plus a 1.3MP camera/camcorder, broadband access to the Web, email, and the ability to work with business and multimedia applications right from the device. This smart-phone is the first from Palm with a built-in streaming application, so users can watch live TV and movie clips and listen to radio stations, all in real time. If that weren't enough, it also functions as a wireless modem via USB or Bluetooth, so users can connect to the Internet from their laptops right out of the box.

Bottom Line: A versatile new Palm smartphone.

wild card



FlashDisc

• \$14.99 (for 3) • www.m-systems.com

wild card

Why: Sometimes, good things come in small packages. The FlashDisc from msystems (recently acquired by SanDisk) takes an old school approach to removable storage and gives it a modern twist. For our daughters and nieces—or anyone who started using computers in the 21st century—the floppy disk is about as familiar as a rotary dial phone. But for those of us who stored term papers on 3.5-inch floppies, or on Zip drives, there's something reassuringly simple and familiar about the return of the floppy. FlashDiscs are mini USB flash drives that work with virtually any PC or Mac. At about \$5 each, they're an affordable way to back up, swap, or transport files without Internet access. They provide 16MB of storage—the equivalent of 16 floppies—which is enough to store about 40 photographs, 15 minutes of music, or a couple hundred average-sized files. Our favorite thing about the FlashDiscs is that they look like the old disks (only smaller and more round).

Bottom Line: A floppy disk with a modern twist.

The Camera:
Sony Cyber-shot
DSC-T10

\$399.99

www.sonymstyle.comThe MP3 Player:
Creative
Zen V Plus

\$229.99 (4GB)

\$149.99 (2GB)

\$119.99 (1GB)

us.creative.comThe Phone:
Palm Treo 700p

\$649.99

www.palm.com/uswww.sprint.comThe Wild Card:
FlashDisc

\$14.99 (for 3)

www.m-systems.com

A/V Club Shopping Tips

Headphones

BY MARTY SEMS

It's such a personal choice. Like the sunglasses you wear and the shoes on your feet, you'll want to choose headphones that fit your ears and suit your style. Toss aside those earbuds that came with your music player, and go shopping with this handy guide.

Earbuds, such as those that come with iPods, fit inside your ears. They shouldn't pop out when you exercise, and you can tuck them in a hip pocket when you're not wearing them. Some people, though, find traditional earcups, which cover your ears entirely, more comfortable. Finally, most earcup sets have a band that fits over your head, but some headphones have a band that runs behind your head from ear to ear.

It's more important to choose comfortable headphones as opposed to a set that may sound a bit better. You won't care about sound quality if your headset hurts your ears, makes you perspire, or gives you a headache. Go to various computer and electronics stores to try on as many headphones as you can.

Headphones typically have left and right stereo speakers. More expensive sets may include multiple speakers in each earcup to create surround sound for movies and games. Others use sound-processing tricks to simulate surround sound from only two speakers. Know that many personal music players, stereos, sound cards, and DVD playback programs can simulate surround sound, too, so you really only need stereo headphones.

While you're trying out 'phones, ask the store clerks if you can listen to your favorite kind of music. Are the bass notes deep enough? (Small speakers in headphones won't ever sound as bassy as a subwoofer.) Do the vocals sound clean and the cymbals crisp? To really put headphones through a workout, bring your own classical music CD: Something with plenty of timpani, deep strings, and high woodwinds will demonstrate which 'phones are good all-around performers.

Noise-canceling headphones cost more, but some sound much better than regular 'phones. They pick up the noises around you with a microphone, and they invert the sound 180 degrees and add that "anti-sound" to what you're listening to. Noise-canceling headphones really can turn down the volume on the world around you, even when you're not listening to other audio. However, not all are created equal. Choose a set with good reviews and try before you buy.

A set of wired headphones gives you the most reliably clean audio, but its cord catches on everything, and if it's too short, you may need an extension cable. As an alternative, spend more money on a wireless set to gain some freedom. Battery life is something to consider with wireless headphones, as is how clear the reception is across a room in your home. Again, online reviews can help you choose. Try a Google or Yahoo! search such as [site:firstglimpsemag.com wireless headphones](http://site:firstglimpsemag.com/wireless-headphones) or [site:cpumag.com wireless headphones](http://site:cpumag.com/wireless-headphones).

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ Style

- ☐ Earbuds
- ☐ Earcups
- ☐ Over-the-head
- ☐ Behind-the-head
- ☐ Color

☐ Subjective Considerations

- ☐ Comfort
- ☐ Sound quality

☐ Features

- ☐ Noise cancellation
- ☐ Wired
- ☐ Wireless
- ☐ Microphone

☐ Speakers

- ☐ Stereo
- ☐ Stereo with simulated surround sound
- ☐ Surround Sound

☐ Notes

CUT HERE

Cook to *your* music.

Now cooking has a groove all its own—yours! When you listen to your iPod® with the iHome iH5™, you'll hear incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our Reson8™ speakers. The iH5 even has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod®, so it's ready to go when you are.

The iH5 is great in any room in your house. Try one in the dining room. And add a key ingredient to all your culinary creations!

iHome is home base.



iHome iH5

To order, visit
www.ihomedirect.com

Or call toll free
1.800.925.6224

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iPod is a registered trademark of Apple Computer Inc.,
in the U.S. and in other countries.
*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

Are You Ready For Some Football?

Best Game-Day TVs

HP PL5060N • \$2,999.99 • www.hp.com



all is here, and for many of us that means watching football. Give your gameday party a tremendous boost with a daz-

zling new TV. We'll recommend some of our favorite models for this season along with a few key considerations for finding the perfect set to take you through years of playoffs and bowl games.

First, football parties need a big screen. Don't settle for less than 34 inches—50 or 60 is best. Viewing angle matters, as well. Unless you and your 10 closest friends are going to cuddle up across from the screen, aim for as close to 180 degrees as possible. Plasmas deliver a roughly 178-degree viewing, and traditional CRTs have wide viewing angles, as well. LCDs sometimes have more limited viewing angles, although we found a few exceptions we won't hesitate to recommend. Rear-projection sets give you more screen size for less money but have more limited viewing angles (horizontally and vertically).

In addition to screen size, we also believe that having a TV that supports high-definition resolution is crucial. Not all games are available in HD, yet, but you won't want to miss the ones that are.

Finally, make sure you get PiP (picture-in-picture) or one of its variations, which lets you view a couple of games at once. There's nothing worse than missing the Packers score on the Vikings because your friend just *had* to check the Steelers' score on another channel. **FC**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

Plasma Models

HD plasma TVs are the best football viewing technology since bleachers came along. They provide high contrast and render fast action with in-your-face clarity.



HP PL5060N

● ● ● ● ● ● ● \$2,999.99 • www.hp.com

This 50-inch set delivers 1080i resolution and vibrant colors and has a built-in HD tuner for picking up games from local over-the-air stations. The side speakers are detachable, saving space for those with surround systems.



Panasonic TH-42PX600U

\$2,999.95 • www2.panasonic.com

Panasonic's plasmas are known for their incredible pictures. This model adds picture-in-picture, a variety of inputs, and a sleek design for a total package.



Pioneer PDP-4360HD

\$3,999.99 • www.pioneerelectronics.com

This 43-inch model produces excellent color and delivers sharp pictures. Ample inputs let you hook up an over-the-air antenna for local games, a cable box for regional broadcasts, *and* a high-definition DVD player (such as a BD [Blu-ray Disc] or HD DVD) for last season's highlight discs

LCD TVs

LCDs have moved from the computer desk to the TV stand, due to their sharp pictures, dazzling color, and reasonable prices. They're not generally as large as plasmas, though these models don't skimp on size.

Samsung LN-S4095D

\$3,299.99 • www.samsung.com

This 40-inch LCD's super fast response time can handle even the most frenzied blitz or fastest punt return. Hidden speakers keep the set looking sleek, and dynamic contrast keeps the picture sharp on both Saturday afternoons and Monday nights.



Dell W3706MC

\$1,799 • www.dell.com

The largest of Dell's LCDs, the W3706MC has several PiP options, a 178-degree viewing angle, and detachable speakers. It can also act as a computer monitor, letting you track in-progress games' stats on-screen.



Rear Projection & CRTs

You need some money left over for grilled chicken and cold beverages. These sets don't have the sexy visual appeal of flat panels but, if you have a large family room, they provide the biggest screens for your money.



Samsung HL-S5688W

\$3,299.99 • www.samsung.com

DLP technology enables big screens and compromises on size between the unwieldy bulk of CRTs and the expensive thinness of flat panels. DLPs also provide great value for their screen sizes. This model's top-of-the-line resolution and spectacular color may overcome its viewing-angle limitations (140 degrees horizontal, 60 degrees vertical) if you're watching with just a couple friends or neighbors. Be certain to look at DLP models before you buy, though. A small number of people see rainbow-like effects, and, if you're one of the unfortunate few, this technology isn't for you.



Sony KD-34XBR970

\$1,199.99 • www.sonystyle.com

Sony's new FD Trinitron CRT models come with full HD resolution and widescreen aspect ratios. This 34-inch model is as big as direct-view CRTs get; the set isn't what you'd call svelte, but the incredible picture and reasonable price may be worth the trade-offs.



Lessons In HDTV

Aspect Ratio & Screen Size

When you tell people you're buying an HDTV, the first question you'll probably hear is: "How big?" Everyone's amazed by the large screens and crisp, beautiful pictures on today's high-definition sets. Similarly, we all love how HDTV's widescreen format makes television more immersive and helps movies stay truer to the director's vision, though few of us think about how these wider dimensions affect overall screen size.

Aspect ratio refers to a display's shape, comparing the screen's width to its height. Standard definition TV signals and traditional CRT televisions use a 4:3 ratio, which means that for every 4 inches wide an image is, it's 3 inches high. HDTV and widescreen DVD formats, on the other hand, have a 16:9 aspect ratio (with 16 inches of width for every 9 inches of height). If you break down the math, you'll see that widescreen formats

are about 34% wider (1.78:1 versus 1.33:1) than traditional television images for a given screen height.

Screen size, however, isn't measured by height. Televisions have long been advertised by their diagonal screen measurement, presumably to make the numbers look more impressive. Total viewing area, on the other hand, is a function of both width and height. This opens up an intriguing geometric puzzle for today's consumers. How do you compare the total viewing area of a TV's image (which you're paying plenty for) between differently shaped aspect ratios? And ultimately, how does HDTV's widescreen format fit into your traditional conception of a 37-inch TV?

We'll risk losing credit for not showing our work, but, in the end, HDTV's widescreen aspect ratio provides about 89% of the viewable area afforded by a standard, 4:3 TV with the same diagonal measurement.

That's because the wider shape of 16:9 screens lengthens the diagonal measurement more than it increases the screen's total area. For example, it takes a 60-inch widescreen plasma to re-create the same total screen area as a 53-inch standard projection CRT. Keep that difference in mind when you're shopping. It's not a massive difference, but it's worth remembering. If you liked your old 27-inch CRT, you'll need to shop for a 32-inch HDTV to maintain the same total screen area.

The widescreen 16:9 aspect ratio is the path of the future, with both television and movies increasingly taking advantage of its wider perspective and more immersive feel. However, size and style, picture quality, and viewing angles matter as well. A screen's shape and size aren't your only shopping considerations, but it's important to understand how the two are related. **EG**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

Listen To A Podcast

The Places You Can Go



ou have your iPod, you've downloaded your podcasts, and you're anxious to get listening. But where's the best place to listen? You've tried the family room (interruptions abound), you've done the listening-while-jogging thing (the gasping is too distracting), and listening in bed simply makes you fall asleep. So you wonder, where else do people go to hear these things? Lots of places, as it turns out. **FG**

BY NEIL RANDALL



My baby takes the morning train.

Commuter trains tend, unfortunately, to offer hopelessly dull traveling experiences. And let's face it, music isn't always the answer. So why not try podcasts? Someone talking to you, informing you of something you're interested in—or would like to be—can help you spend the time far more enjoyably than anything else, and if you start collecting daily or weekly podcasts from the same people, you can have, in effect, a personalized pod-column.



Mommy, are we there yet?

Much as you delight in the sounds of your children's voices as they waft from the backseat, there's nothing as joyful as plugging an iPod into your ear, ignoring the goings-on behind you, and listening to your favorite podcast. If you're actually driving the car, you can't use the headphones for this, but even listening through the stereo with an FM transmitter (we like Griffin's iTrip Auto [\$69.99; www.griffin-technology.com]) is better than tuning to a radio station featuring mediocre songs.



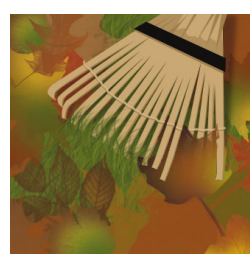
Stop, stop, stop all the dancing . . .

Dance classes are great for your children's motor skills and teamwork skills, but somehow that measly little hour feels like at least two hours every time, and you can only choke down so many coffees as you wait. What a perfect time to break out your audio player and take in a podcast or two. Suddenly, the one-hour class will seem like mere minutes, and you'll be able to raptly listen to your little dancer's after-class recaps on the way home.



Cleanliness is next to podliness.

There are people in this country who truly love cleaning their kitchens, basements, silver tea sets, and cars. These people have no need for distractions from their tasks. However, many of us do, and podcasts are a perfect companion at such trying times. And while you're listening, your mind will be sufficiently occupied, so you won't race through the cleaning; when you clean slowly, you clean more carefully and completely.



Get ready to hibernate.

Who doesn't love the crisp, cool air that signals the arrival of fall? It also signals the need to start working on winterizing your yard by raking leaves, pulling up your annual flowers and zucchini vines, and putting down that last layer of fertilizer before the snow hits. All that hard work and fresh air feels fantastic, and it's a prime opportunity to catch up on your favorite cooking or baking podcast because chances are you'll want a slice of pumpkin bread and a mug of hot cocoa when you're finished.

SPLURGE

If you're ready to furnish your family/media room, we've got the goods, whether your budget is just this side of exorbitant or a bit on the modest side.

1 Panasonic TH-58PX600U 58-inch Plasma TV

Ninth-generation plasma technology delivers nearly 29 billion colors.
\$5,999.95 • www.panasonic.com

2 Polk Audio LSi25 Home Theater Speaker System

This multitasking overachiever saves video on a near-bottomless drive, uses TV Guide's On Screen Interactive Program Guide for no-fuss recording, and burns DVDs for additional archiving.
\$6,049.80 • www.polkaudio.com

3 Toshiba RD-XS55 DVD Recorder with 250GB drive

Gives movies and music alike the complete audiophile treatment.
\$699.99 • www.toshiba.com

4 Denon AVR-5805MK2 THX Ultra2 Multi-Channel/Zone A/V Surround Receiver with Internet Radio

Because makers of high-end speakers such as Polk assume you'll furnish your own cutting-edge receiver.
\$7,000 • www.denon.com

5 Diamond Case Designs Castleton Wall Unit

Its beauty is matched only by its storage capacity for oodles of components and discs.
\$4,500 • www.diamondcase.com

6 Ligne Roset TOGO With Arms Sofa

See the armless model if you'd prefer to put together an equally plush sectional group.
\$4,095 as pictured; \$2,925 to \$6,630, depending on fabric and finish
• www.ligne-rosset-usa.com

7 Molly Rose Chair-Forest Pattern, by Mary Lynn O'Shea

Rule the room from this beautiful designer chair.
\$3,200 • www.guild.com

8 Hubbardton Forge Stasis #23-2665 Floor Lamp

A glass tube hanging from a sweeping metal arc, this is one of the most striking lamps we've ever seen.
\$862 • www.vtforge.com



6



4



1



5



3



2



7

8



Photo by Glenn Moody

Total Price - \$35,405.74



STEAL

Family & Media Room

BY BRIAN HODGE



6

1 Panasonic CT-30WX15 Tau Series 30-inch PureFlat HDTV Monitor

The set may not take up an entire wall, but tube technology still delivers one of the best high-definition pictures you can buy.

\$899.95 • www.panasonic.com

2 Onkyo HT-S680 Home Theater Audio System

Consolidate your shopping with this great-sounding receiver/player/speaker bundle.

\$399 • www.onkyo.com

3 TiVo TCD649080 Series2 DT Digital Video Recorder DVR

Records 80 hours of TV in half the time. How? Its dual tuner can grab two channels at once!

\$30 + subscription • www.tivo.com

4 Apple iPod + DLO Homedock

This combo gives your sound system easy access to your digital music collection.

iPod: \$299 for 30GB model •

www.apple.com

Homedock: \$99.99 • www.dlo.com

5 O'Sullivan Manor Hill TV Stand (#20555)

A home for your TV and a few components at a price you can't argue with.

\$179 • www.osullivan.com

6 Home Reserve Classic Sofa

Assemble your new sofa yourself to save a few Benjamins.

\$299 & up, depending on fabric • www.homereserve.com

7 IKEA Lillberg Rocking Chair

Settle back into those clean Swedish lines.

\$109 • www.IKEA.com

Phone toll-free (877) 345-4532

8 Lamps Plus Halogen Torchiera Floor Lamp (#18980)

Set just the right mood for any moment with this lamp's dimmer knob.

\$49.95 • www.lampsplus.co



4



1



5



3



7



2



8

Total Price - \$2,364.89

(\$299 less if you already have an iPod)

tips

HDTV Settings

1

Tune The Room

Before optimizing your HDTV's picture, adjust the room lighting to your normal viewing conditions. Ideally, the room should be darkened (use curtains or blinds if it's daytime), with a dim lamp on behind the TV to reduce eyestrain. If your TV is against a wall, put the light somewhere so it doesn't reflect on the screen. Finally, don't be surprised if, out of the box, the TV's picture looks noticeably different from what you saw in the store. Showrooms often adjust floor models to a state dubbed "torch mode" to grab shoppers' attention in a bright, busy environment.

3

Adjust Contrast (aka White Level)

An overly contrasted picture may be visually compelling in the store, but for home viewing it'll wear on your eyes. A low-contrast picture looks drab. To find a happy medium, pause a DVD on a scene containing a lot of white, with a substantial amount of textural detail. The snowscapes in "March of the Penguins" would be a good candidate. As with Brightness, crank the Contrast to its maximum value and then reduce it just to the point where you can clearly make out those textural details.

2

Set Brightness (aka Black Level)

Now, grab the remote and adjust basic settings. First, though, turn off any automatic settings for color, black level, etc., that might undo your work. Next, pause a DVD on a scene containing a feature you know is supposed to be a rich black—Darth Vader's outfit, for instance. Crank Brightness to its maximum value and then back it down again just to the point at which the feature looks black rather than charcoal or dark gray. Now continue playback. If you notice that detail in shadowed areas is obscured, you may have gone too far and need to brighten it a bit.

4

Continue With Color

If your HDTV has an option for **color temperature** (a measurement of color on the Kelvin scale that determines how warm or cool an image appears), set it to the industry standard of 6,500 degrees. If you prefer a warmer picture, try 7,500. TVs vary, so these may instead be listed as presets called Standard and Warm or something similar. Now, find a DVD scene showing several people's faces and adjust Color until skin tones look the most pleasingly natural to you. Pay special attention to reds. When color saturation is too high, reds generally reveal it first, appearing too harsh and glaring.

5

Take Your Time

For painstaking adjustments, invest in a calibration DVD, such as Monster Cable's Monster/ISF HDTV Calibration Wizard (\$29.95; www.monstercable.com) or Ovation Multimedia's Avia: Guide to Home Theater (\$49.99; www.ovationmultimedia.com). For the ultimate in fine-tuning, turn the job over to a technician certified by the Imaging Science Foundation (www.imaging-science.com). You can use the site's locator to find techs in your area. It's not cheap—a \$300 charge isn't out of line—but an ISF professional will be able to optimize deep-menu settings that you're better off leaving alone.



BY BRIAN HODGE

Wake up to *your* music.

The new iHome iH5™ wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod® music. The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound. It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

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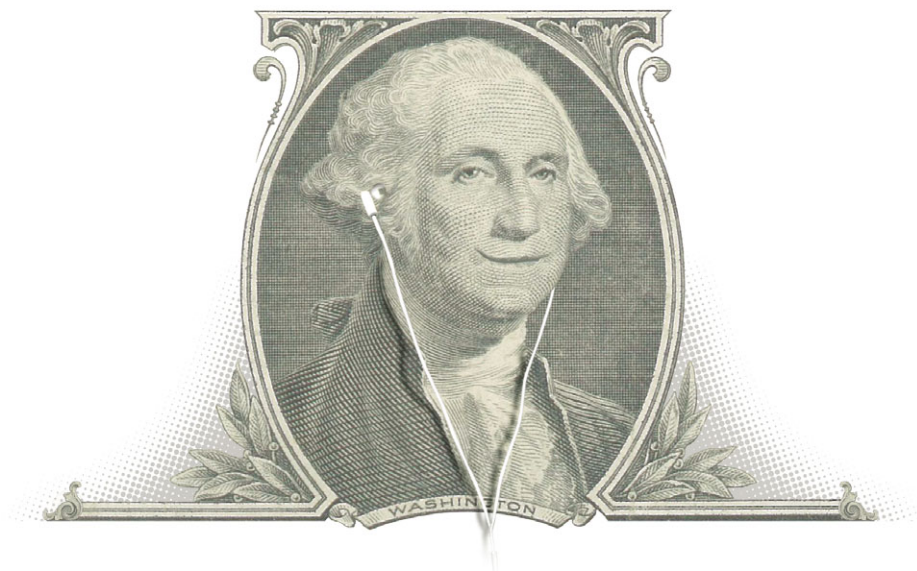
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Consumer Electronics On A

BUDGET

Inexpensive Doesn't Have To Mean Cheap

FINANCIALLY, MOST PEOPLE HAVE SEEN THEIR PURCHASING POWER PRETTY MUCH LEVEL OFF LATELY AND MAYBE EVEN DECLINE SOMEWHAT—that's the upshot of the major economic reports we've seen over the last couple years. But you wouldn't know it if you were just gauging the foot traffic in and out of your nearest Best Buy. Our checking accounts may feel as though growth has stalled, but we love our electronics more than ever.

Put these two trends together and one thing becomes obvious: Finding bargain buys and other ways of getting the most for our money is a top shopping priority.

The Good News

Fortunately, consumer electronics are subject to a trend of their own that shows no sign of abating. They continually get cheaper, include more functions, and often do it all better than their predecessors did.

There's no better illustration of this than what is probably the most ubiquitous gadget on the street right now: the iPod (www.apple.com/ipod). When Apple brought out the first generation of the world's most popular digital music player in October 2001, the iPod boasted a 5GB hard drive and a price tag of \$399.

Five years later, how much iPod will \$399 get you? A sleek, top-of-the-line video iPod with 12 times the storage capacity (60GB) and the ability to display photos and play video on a sharp color screen.

If you'd be happy with something closer to the original specs, then perhaps you might want to consider the 4GB iPod nano. Augmented with solid-state memory, this nifty little machine will only run you \$249. And the price tags on other models go as low as \$69, for the 512MB iPod shuffle.

Your Reach Might Be Longer Than You Think

If you've been putting off buying a particular CE device because it seems a little too pricey at the moment, you may discover that it can fit within your budget after all. Maybe you've let a lingering impression of outdated prices stop you or just haven't found that killer bargain yet.

So where do your unindulged interests lie? How about, for instance, taking digital photographs and then making high-quality prints on the spot for anyone who wants a copy?

Canon is one manufacturer that provides the tools you'll need and at a cost that won't break the bank. One of our favorite budget-friendly combinations that doesn't skimp on quality is the 5MP PowerShot A530 camera (\$199.99; www.canonusa.com) and the Selphy CP510 Compact Photo Printer (\$99.99). The camera has 17 easy shooting modes, and the printer uses a dye-sublimation process for gorgeous prints with a protective coating. If you have a Bluetooth-enabled phone, use an optional adapter (\$79) to print your pictures.

The cost: \$299.98 for both, but that's list price—you'll likely find it for less if you go to a store or shop around online. With the money you save by bargain-hunting, you can invest in a SanDisk Standard 512MB SD memory card (\$39.99; www.sandisk.com). That's enough room for 190 shots at the highest size and quality settings.

So maybe it's time to make the jump. In the next few articles, we'll take a look at some cost-effective options for getting into digital photography, MP3 players, HDTV, and a grab bag of other budget-friendly favorites. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE



Digital Photography On A Budget

How To Be Snap Happy Without Breaking The Bank

For some of us, walking into an electronics store is akin to setting a kid loose in a candy store. Instead of bright colors and sweet smells, though, we're faced with shiny new cameras, printers that make snapshots look like prize-winning photos, and more accessories than you'll find on the models walking the runway at Olympus Fashion Week in New York.

Fortunately, getting into digital photography can cost a lot less than outfitting yourself with a Prada bag or Manolo stilettos.

In fact, there are plenty of ways to put together a digital photography outfit without turning your wallet inside out.

Timing Is Everything

Although you won't find digital cameras at a sample sale, you'll usually find lots of good deals in the Sunday paper circulars, so before you head out to your local Ritz Camera or Target, do some comparison shopping. Also check the Internet for pricing. A recent virtual journey to Best Buy's site

Kodak EasyShare One • \$199.95 • www.kodak.com



(www.bestbuy.com) revealed some good bargains, such as the 4MP Nikon Coolpix L4 for \$139.99. In addition to highly competitive prices, B&H Photo Video (www.bhphotovideo.com) offers basic and deluxe accessory kit bundles for many digital cameras. On the B&H Web site at press time, the 4MP Canon PowerShot A430 was selling for \$149.94 (camera only), or for \$182.80 it comes with a 256MB SanDisk SD card, a 16MB MMC, a soft case, two AA alkaline batteries, four AA NiMH rechargeable batteries with a 4-hour charger, a USB cable and an A/V cable, and a one-year limited warranty.

Fall is an especially good time to buy a digital camera, not only because of

holiday sales, but also because it's the time when many digital camera manufacturers announce a new line of cameras. Once these new cameras start shipping, there's usually a price drop on the models they replace. The same thing is true in the spring when cameras announced in January/February start shipping.

Affordable Finds

Even on a budget, you'll find that most digital cameras are equipped with 4 or 5MP and a 3X optical zoom—two specifications

shelf watch

Nikon D80
\$999.99 (body only) • www.nikondigital.com

As your budget grows and your photography skills increase, you may want to invest in a D-SLR (digital single-lens reflex); the advantages are legion, but chief among them is the ability to change lenses. The gorgeous 10.2MP Nikon D80 has a fast, 80ms shutter response time and continuous shoot at 3fps. For \$1,299.95, get the body bundled with the 18-135mm DX Zoom Nikkor lens, as well.



Make It Work!

Whether you're a first-timer or on your way to your second or third digital camera, we've put together a few tips to help you get the most from your digital photography experience.

Save space—edit as you go. One of the benefits of digital cameras is being able to see a picture right after you take it. If you like the picture, do nothing; if you don't, you can delete it. By deleting images as you go, not only will you have space on the media card for more pictures, but also editing out the not-so-great pictures will cut down on the time and effort you'll expend transferring and organizing your image files later on.

On the small screens of digital cameras, it's often difficult to know whether

the picture is really a keeper. When you're reviewing images in Playback mode, use the zoom lever to get a close-up of image details. Take advantage of the four-way controller or the jog dial to move from side to side and up and down. Make sure the picture is in focus and check to see if your subjects have red-eye or if their eyes are closed. With that information, you can decide if you want to keep the picture or delete it.

Go beyond point-and-shoot. You don't have to have a high-powered camera to improve your photographs. At the very least, adjust White Balance settings according to lighting conditions. Even if you use a flash, ambient light will affect the background of

your image, so set the white balance to tungsten when the scene is lit by regular light bulbs and Fluorescent for fluorescent bulbs, for example.

Keep records. When you're not photographing the kids playing soccer or the baby taking her first steps, you might want to make a visual record of important (and/or insured) items, such as jewelry, electronic equipment, and cars—anything you want a record of if you need to file a claim.

Don't keep pictures to yourself. Make sure you share pictures with family and friends. There are plenty of free online photo-sharing sites, such as Snapfish (www.snapfish.com), Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com), the Kodak EasyShare

Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com), where you can quickly and easily post your images for private (or public) viewing. Make grandma happy and let her see your children in their latest school play, holiday outfit, or sporting event.

Carry it with you. How many times have you seen a beautiful landscape or an amazing garden and regretted not having your camera with you? Digital cameras are often small enough to keep tucked away in your purse, so it's not a hassle to carry with you. We recently saw some beautiful flowers at the entrance to an apartment community and took a picture, so next time we visit the local nursery we can find out what they are and, perhaps, buy a few for our garden next spring. ●

Image-Editing Software

Digital cameras usually come with some sort of software. At the very least, you'll be able to view your images with it, but more than likely, bundled software has enough features to make basic adjustments to color and exposure, as well as perform functions such as cropping and fixing red-eye. Free programs with similarly basic image-editing features include Kodak EasyShare 6 (www.kodak.com), HP Photosmart Essential (www.hp.com), Photo Finale QS (quickstart), or Picasa (www.picasa.com). For a full feature set, we recommend Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0 (\$99 Win; \$89 Mac; www.adobe.com). ●

that will provide prints as large as 8x10 and sufficient zoom for most picture-taking situations.

A few of our favorite affordable digital cameras include the 5MP Canon PowerShot A530 (\$229.99; www.powershot.com), which features a 4X optical zoom and has easy-to-use program modes. It also features a manual mode for more advanced users (or point-and-shooters who are willing to grow their photographic skills).

The 5MP Panasonic LZ3 (\$199.95; www.panasonic.com) is a great value because it features a 6X optical zoom and optical image stabilization (which uses gyroscope-like technology to help prevent blur at slow shutter speeds), two excellent features that you'll rarely find in cameras at this price point.

With the 4MP Kodak EasyShare One (\$199.95; www.kodak.com), you'll get



Canon PowerShot A530 • \$229.99 • www.powershot.com

cool looks and cool features, such as a huge 3-inch touchscreen LCD and wireless capabilities so you can beam your images from camera to wireless-enabled computers and printers. Better yet, you can even fire up your T-Mobile account at a hotspot and send your images to friends and family via the online Kodak Gallery.

Kit Necessities

Don't forget to budget for the cost of a media card for your camera. Most consumer digicams use the SD format. We recommend a minimum of 512MB, which ring in at \$39.99 from SanDisk (www.sandisk.com) and \$23 from Kingston (www.kingston.com) for standard speed cards.

Only a few cameras, such as the Kodak EasyShare One, come with protective slips, so you'll probably want a pouch or small bag, such as the Rezo 15 from Lowepro (\$16; www.lowepro.com) to protect your camera and make it easier to carry.

If your camera uses AA batteries, make sure to pick up rechargeable batteries

and a charger (\$19.99 for a compact charger and four AA rechargeable batteries; www.energizer.com). And when you need to steady your camera for low-light shots, the fun Gorilla Pod (\$24.95 or \$21.95 for the environmentally friendly unpackaged model direct from Joby; www.joby.com) is a great little tripod. It's compact and has bendable legs so you can attach it anywhere.

If you don't have a photo printer at home, you might want to take a look at the new Kodak EasyShare G600 printer dock (\$149.95; www.kodak.com). The printer has a handle, so it's portable, and its optional battery pack is \$49.95. If you don't want to be limited to 4x6 prints, then consider the new full-sized Canon Pixma IP 4300 (\$99; www.canonusa.com), which produces up to 8.5x11 prints.

Before you start your comparison shopping, make a list of everything you need (or want). Then, run your numbers to make sure you're within budget. After that, it's a quick trip to the store (or online) and you're ready to have fun. **FC**

BY THEANO NIKITAS

The Big Screen On A Budget

Maximize Your HDTV Money

Buying an HDTV used to be fairly straightforward: Pay big bucks for a big screen with big features or pay a fraction of the price for a barebones set with a tiny screen. Not anymore. Today's budget HDTVs have screen sizes truly worthy of the name home theater, and they are packed with cutting-edge technology. The challenge now isn't finding a relatively inexpensive HDTV, it's narrowing your choices to just one. Here are our picks for the top three sets currently available at a variety of budget-conscious price points.

Best Set For Around \$2,000

Vizio P50HDM

\$1,999 • www.vinc.com

Plasma technology is still among the finest available in terms of color purity, screen brightness, and overall picture quality. Just a few years ago, a big 50-inch plasma screen like this one would have cost as much as a Hyundai. The Vizio P5-HDM has an incredibly good contrast ratio, making for whiter

Sharp AQUOS LC-26D4OU • \$1,099 • www.sharppusa.com



whites and blacker blacks compared to other sets in this price range, and its screen resolution easily handles standard 720p high-definition signals. This large set also has a wide viewing angle so people on either end of the couch won't miss out on anything.

Best Set For Around \$1,500

Westinghouse LVM-37w3

\$1699 • www.westinghouse.com

OK, so you aren't likely to find this set for less than \$1,500, but stretching your budget a bit buys you a lot of features compared to competing models. Native 1080p support is high on the list of sweet extras, as that standard offers a much more detailed picture than 720p, and it's nice to know the set is ready to handle 1080p video when that standard becomes widely available. The pixels that make up the picture can

respond to input in as little as 8 milliseconds, which is fast enough to help smooth out quick motion in movies and video games. The LVM-37w3 also has six separate HD video inputs, including two coveted HDMI inputs, making it the perfect centerpiece for your advanced audio/video setup.

Best Set For Around \$1,000

Sharp AQUOS LC-26D40U

\$1,099 • www.sharppusa.com

Sharp is known for its excellent LCD televisions, and its LC-26D40U proves why. It is bright, offers razor-sharp image detail, and doesn't suffer from lag that makes the picture stutter during scenes with fast action—a real

shelf watch

Sony BRAVIA KDL-46V2500
\$4,500 • www.sonymstyle.com

At \$4,500, the Sony BRAVIA KDL-46V2500 is a budget bender, but this lovely 46-inch flat-panel LCD TV will clearly show every clump of turf in every helmet so you won't miss a single detail of the Big 12 North Division game unless you choose an inopportune moment to stir the pot of chili in the kitchen.



problem with less capable LCD sets. Also, don't let the relatively small size fool you. This HDTV has a slew of inputs, including two HDMI inputs, meaning you can connect nearly everything to it both now and in the foreseeable future.

Buying A Stand

Some budget HDTVs, such as bulky RPTVs and CRTs, are not suitable for mounting on a wall; the least expensive option then is a TV stand. Best Buy is a great place to get stands; you'll find many more models at its online site (www.bestbuy.com) than you'll find in its retail stores. Be sure to take a look at the budget-friendly models from Init. The \$149.99 Init PR-TV101, for example, holds tube televisions up to 36-inches wide (meaning it should work well with larger but lighter plasma, LCD, and DLP sets) and has cutouts in the back to keep cables nice and neat. The real selling point, aside from the low price, is the inclusion of three glass shelves, providing plenty of room to accommodate all of your audio/video equipment. ●



Westinghouse LVM-37w3 • \$1,699 • www.westinghouse.com

Time To Accessorize

When you're shopping for an HDTV, don't forget to budget for all of the additional equipment you'll need to take full advantage of its features. Good cables are a priority, as only certain types of cables can handle an HDTV signal. Opting for less expensive cables results in a low-definition, fuzzy connection that looks horrible. At minimum, you want component analog video cables, such as the 6-foot DA901 from

Acoustic Research (\$21.99 at www.bestbuy.com). For even better picture quality, especially if you have a digital flat-panel, such as an LCD or DLP display, are digital DVI (Digital Visual Interface) cables such as the Acoustic Research AP097 (\$51.99) or HDMI cables, such as the Acoustic Research AP085 (\$63.99).

Also consider buying a universal remote control because you'll likely attach a lot of devices to the new HDTV.

Sony's RM-VL600 Learning Remote Control (\$24; www.sonystyle.com) is full-featured, easy to program, and inexpensive, making it the perfect tool for controlling all of your budget audio/video components. Best of all, you can use all of the money you just saved to stock up on your favorite microwave popcorn. **FG**

BY TRACY BAKER

No Cable Subscription? No Problem

If you think you need to get a digital cable TV subscription to enjoy local network programming in high-definition, think again. Although cable is often the best bet because providers tend to be locally owned and operated, there are a few alternatives.

First, check to see if your HDTV has an integrated HDTV tuner (these sets are sometimes advertised as HD Integrated or HD Built-In). If it does, you can connect it to an HDTV antenna, such as the indoor Terk HDTVi (\$39.95; www.audiovox.com) and receive OTA (Over-The-Air) HD programming from local broadcasters using only the TV. Most large communities have stations that offer HD programming for at least part of the day (generally during prime-time, but sometimes more often), and going this route means you won't need to pay a monthly subscription fee.

If you have an HDTV monitor (sometimes advertised as an HD-Ready television), then it doesn't have its own tuner, and you'll need to buy a separate set-top box tuner, such as the Samsung SIR-T451 (\$249.99; www.samsung.com) to enjoy OTA HD broadcasts. Attach an HDTV antenna to the set-top box and then attach the box to your HDTV using component, (Digital Visual Interface), or HDMI cables.

Picture quality in this type of setup depends on the size and quality of the antenna you buy, the quality of the tuner that decodes the HD signal, and the strength of the OTA signal in your area. Signal strength can vary from channel to channel if broadcasters transmit from different towers, so don't be surprised if one channel comes in crystal-clear while others don't. Signals are also affected by buildings, atmospheric conditions, and other things entirely outside

of your control. Although adjusting the antenna or swapping it for a different model can sometimes mitigate these effects, there are some compromises you'll simply have to live with.

Help From The Eye In The Sky

Satellite service may be another option, depending on where you live. Dish Network (www.dishnetwork.com) offers local programming for more than 160 cities nationwide, and for \$5.99 per month you can add local channels from one of those cities to your lineup. Some or all of those channels may be available in high-definition, too, depending on the city you choose, so visit the Web site, expand the Programming menu, and click Local Channels for details.

DirecTV (www.directv.com) offers local programming for 142 metropolitan areas nationwide, although not all have HD versions,

and you must select a subscription package that includes the local service to receive these channels. You can see if your local area currently is covered by visiting the Web site, clicking Local Channels, and entering your ZIP code.

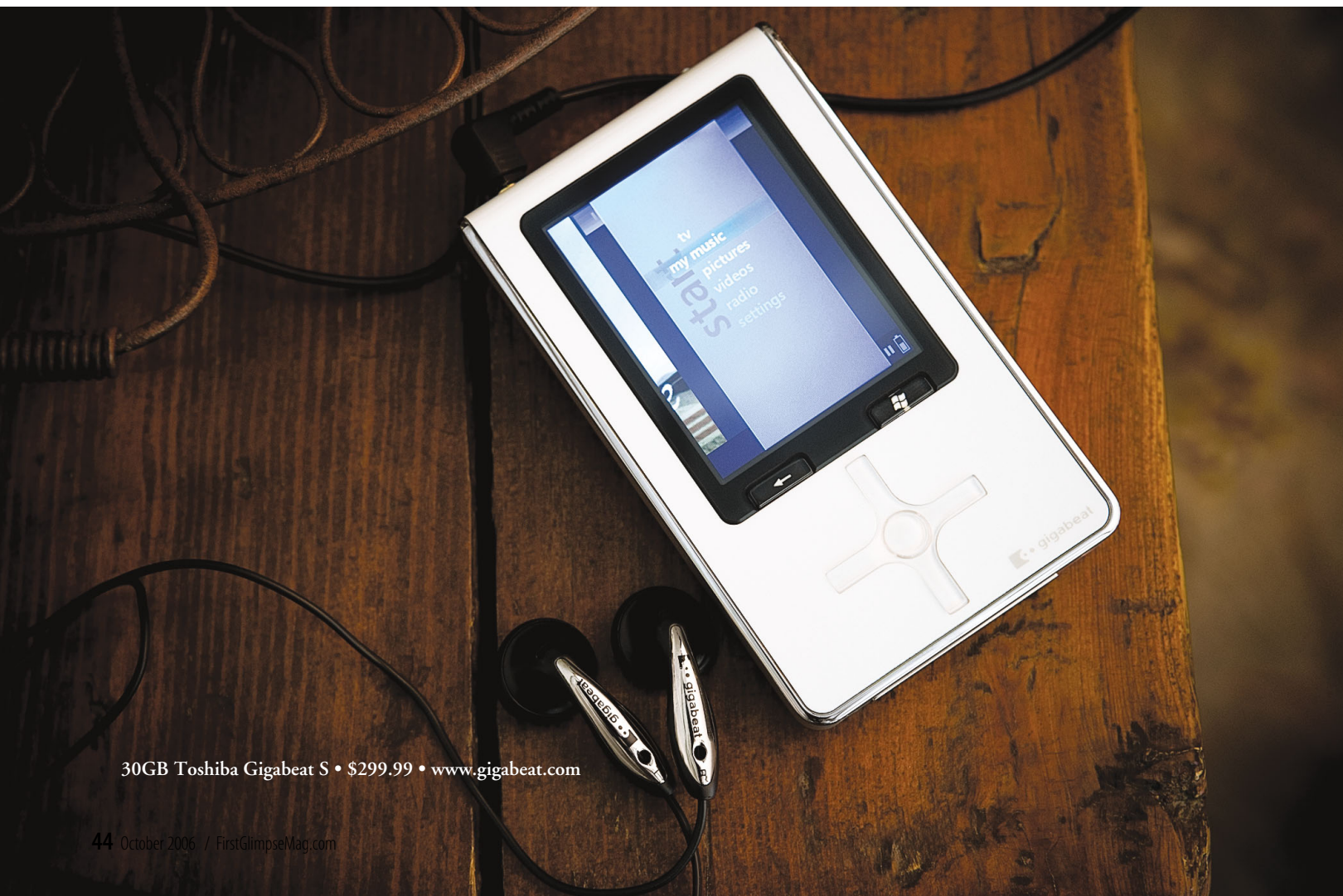
Both the Dish Network and DirecTV require that you buy or lease premium equipment to view any HD channels, including local channels. Keep this in mind when pricing out the different package deals and try to find one that provides free or reduced-price installation and/or hardware to dramatically reduce the overall cost. All of the cables and other components you need to enjoy an HD signal should be provided by the satellite company, but they may only provide component cables even though DVI or HDMI cables are a better match for your set, so you may need to budget for those, as well. ●

Budget-Friendly MP3 Players

Quality Players That Won't Break The Bank

Whether you like to listen in your car, on the treadmill, or as you're walking across town, digital music is definitely the way to go. Strapping on your old portable CD player or—gasp!—cassette player looks and feels a lot like toting around a circa 1986, brick-sized mobile phone. But with so many features, forms, prices, and sizes, how do you know which player is right for you (and your budget)?

If you're thinking about buying an MP3 player, you're probably considering an iPod. You may even think an iPod is your only option. Although iPods are undeniably hip and stylish—and the Click Wheel is the hands-down winner in terms of user-friendly navigation—before you jump on the iPod bandwagon, take a look at some other players and make an informed choice about what's best for you and your wallet. You may sell yourself short (and overspend) if you don't shop around.



30GB Toshiba Gigabeat S • \$299.99 • www.gigabeat.com

Creative Zen V 2GB • \$149.99 • us.creative.com

Among the top contenders for shoppers who want to spend less than \$100, is the Creative Labs Zen Nano Plus (512MB \$59.99, 1GB \$69.99; us.creative.com). At

\$69.99, the 1GB version is a \$30 savings over the most affordable 1GB iPod—the shuffle (\$99; www.ipod.com). The Zen Nano Plus comes in an assortment of colors, is about the size of a lighter, and has an FM tuner, as well as a small, two-line display; the latter are two features that the shuffle doesn't offer.

Also in the sub-\$100 category is SanDisk's SDMX1 series (256MB \$49.99, 512MB \$79.99; www.sandisk.com). Although the prices might suggest barebones players, the SDMX1s are both full-featured and attractive. They look like tubes of lipstick; come in one color per size (the 256MB player is a snazzy red; the 512MB is a tasteful blue); play both MP3 and WMA files; include an FM tuner, a voice recorder, and a small display; and let you transfer files via USB 2.0. If you want a highly portable player with good

sound and the capacity to hold 120 songs, there's no reason to spend twice as much on a shuffle (or another flash player) when you could get a 256MB SanDisk for half the price.

If you have \$200 or more in your budget, the iRiver Clix (2GB \$199.99; www.iriver.com), offers a unique, compact design and is chock-full of features including a voice recorder and an FM radio. iRiver is known for the sound quality of its players. The 2GB Clix is priced identically to the iPod nano; if you're choosing between the two, your decision comes down to look, feel, and features.

Also in the sub-\$200 realm are two new players from Creative, the Zen V (1GB \$119.99, 2GB \$149.99, and 4GB \$199.99) and Zen V Plus (1GB \$129.99, 2GB \$169.99, 4GB \$229.99). Both are loaded with extras and have vivid 1.5-inch color displays, as well as voice and line-in recording and a cute, compact design, which makes them easy to pop in a

Comparing iPods

Seeing how iPods stack up side-by-side can help you decide which one is the best buy for you. Half the fun of owning an iPod, of course, is the bountiful assortment of custom accessories you can find, so we've also picked a couple of our favorite accessories for each.

iPod	Measurements (in inches)	Capacity	Special Features	Price	Price Per GB	Best Accessories
shuffle	3.3 x 0.98 x 0.33 (HxWxD)	512MB; 1GB	Shuffle mode; charge and fill via USB	\$69; \$99	\$138; \$99	Sport Case (\$29; www.apple.com); Shure eSeries earphones (\$109 to \$319; www.shure.com)
nano	3.5 x 1.6 x 0.27	1GB; 2GB; 4GB	1.5-inch color LCD; up to 25,000 photos; ScreenLock	\$149; \$199; \$249	\$149; \$99.50; \$62.25	iFrogz Wrapz, Bandz, Screenz (set \$31; ifrogz.com); Otter-Box for iPod (\$14.95 to \$39.95; www.otterbox.com)
Video	1.6 x 3.5 x 0.27	30GB; 60GB	150 hours of video; 20 hours battery life; video out	\$299; \$399	\$9.96; \$6.65	Entertainment Dock 500 (\$99.99; us.kensington.com); Socks (\$29 set of six; www.apple.com)

pocket. The V Plus also offers an FM tuner and video playback. Compared to the iPod nano (1GB \$149, 2GB \$199, 4GB \$249), the Zen V and V Plus have more bang for your buck and give you more freedom. With support for most online music services, including Napster (www.napster.com), Rhapsody (www.real.com/rhapsody), and AOL Music (music.aol.com), the Creative players (and nearly every player from major manufacturers except Apple) let you choose where, when, and how you'll get your music. iPod users are committed to iTunes.

The area in which iPods shine is design. They're user-friendly and almost irresistibly attractive. For shoppers with \$200 or less to spend on an iPod, the nano and the shuffle are the available choices. The shuffle comes in 512MB (\$69) or 1GB (\$99) versions; the nano is available in three sizes, two of which—1GB (\$149) and 2GB (\$199)—cost \$200 or less. Apple estimates that a 1GB player can hold 240 songs. (A 512MB player will hold half that amount.)

When choosing a player, your decision will partly be about capacity—how many

songs you can store at once. As important, though, is how good the player feels in your hands, how easy it is to carry or run with, and how quickly you can learn to use it. On paper, a player's capacity and list of features may seem divine, but once you hold it in, you may find it's bulky or awkward, the menus you'll use most are buried, or the interface is confusing. You may find that the buttons are too small for your fingers, or the screen isn't bright. The only way to know for sure if a player is worth your money is to try it out.

Odds are, you know someone with an iPod. If so, you can get information from the best source around—an actual user, someone that you trust. If she's willing to part with her iPod for a few minutes, take it for a test run. Or, go to a brick-and-mortar retail store where you can get your hands on devices from several manufacturers and ask questions of the sales staff. Call around to see which stores carry the models you're interested in; you may be able to try out the players you like without driving all over town.

shelf watch

Kolcraft Jeep Liberty Limited Urban Terrain Stroller
\$139.99 • www.kolcraft.com

This rugged jogging stroller with its air-filled tires and included pump is *deluxe*. In addition to the latest safety features, it has a Music On The Move Parent Tray, in which you can lock your MP3 or portable CD player. The tray includes speakers, amplifier, and jack, and it also sports two cup holders for your water bottles. We were also pleased to hear the child tray is removable.



Wrap It Up, I'll Take It

A new MP3 player is one of the most enjoyable CE devices you can buy. Within minutes of getting it out of the box you can listen to your favorite tunes or audio books, watch downloaded videos, or play with its many other features. Take the time to find just the right player for you, the one that gives you what you need without making you pay for things you don't. It's a smart investment—and with the money you save, you can buy yourself some extra music, video, or other audio files to fill up your perfect player. **FG**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

The Big Guns

Buying an MP3 player for \$150 is all well and good, just so long as you don't mind storage that maxes out around 240 songs. If you want to run with the big dogs, but don't have money to burn, consider how these heavy-hitters stack up.

Device	Price	Capacity	Price Per GB	Notable Features
Toshiba Gigabeat S (www.gigabeat.com)	\$299.99; \$399.99	30GB; 60GB	\$9.99; \$6.66	Compact design; Plays video; FM tuner; compatible with TiVoToGo; supports major online music services
Apple video iPod (www.ipod.com)	\$299; \$399	30GB; 60GB	\$9.96; \$6.65	Plays video; thin and light; Click Wheel; syncs with iTunes via USB; plays video or photo slideshows on TV (with dock)
Zen Vision:M (us.creative.com)	\$299.99	30 GB	\$9.99	Five color choices; 2.5-inch color screen; plays video; FM tuner; voice recorder; supports major online music services
SanDisk Sansa e270 (www.sandisk.com)	\$279.99	6GB	\$46.66	Flash-based; click-wheel-type controller; FM tuner with on-the-fly recording; supports major online music services

Other Budget-Friendly Favorites

These Practical Devices Are Affordable
To Keep & Give

Some women get an adrenaline rush from jogging or Jazzercise. We get ours from finding good deals. Budget-friendly deals don't necessarily mean finding the least expensive thing on the market. After all, the adage that "you get what you pay for" usually holds true, no matter what you're buying. So, we kept that in mind as we went looking for practical CE items that are an appealing blend of quality and price.

Phones

The strategy for some mobile phone shoppers is to find the best monthly service plan and then just take the phone that comes with it. An affordable plan is important, of course, but you don't want to be stuck with a cheap or ugly phone with limited features simply because you got a great deal on the plan.



Shure E2c earphones • \$109 • www.shurestore.com

If you adjust your thinking, you can find affordable, attractive, quality phones and good plans from nationwide carriers. For instance, the LX350 from LG, available from Sprint (\$49.99 with a two-year plan; www.sprint.com), offers a lot of features in a clamshell body weighing just 3.7 ounces. It provides the options of voice, text, and instant messaging and Web access, plus has Bluetooth capability, a built-in speakerphone, 1.3MP camera/camcorder, and memory to store almost 270 photos.

Similarly, the clamshell-style Sony Ericsson Z300a, available from Cingular (\$59.99; www.cingular.com), is practical and attractive. When you're not talking or sending multimedia messages, use the built-in alarm clock, calendar, or calculator for basic tasks. The Z300a also features photo caller ID, so you can assign a photo and ringtone to individuals listed in the phone book/contact list. The photo, of course, displays inside, but the phone has external caller ID, which displays the name and number of the person calling. Best of all, we love the sleek look of this lightweight (3.2 ounces) phone. The external digital clock that you can change to look like an analog clock and the available colors (granite grey and amethyst purple) make this one phone you'll love to show and use.

USB Flash Drives

More and more, USB flash drives are becoming *the* CE accessory to have. They are so practical, necessary, and ubiquitous that manufacturers are making them small and durable enough to fit on key chains.

That's true of the new SanDisk Cruzer Titanium drive (\$74.99 for 1GB and \$119.99 for 2GB; www.sandisk.com). U3 smart technology lets you load both files and software on this drive, including Preferences, Favorites, and even Wallpaper. Though it's carrying valuable



Clark & Mayfield Rosemont • \$99 • www.clarkandmayfield.com

Laptop Bags For Every Season

Not everyone can afford a laptop bag that's as pricey as an entry-level desktop PC. For those who want a less expensive way to tote around their notebooks, we found two good options.

The Rosemont collection from Clark & Mayfield (\$99 and up; www.clarkandmayfield.com) is an appealing blend of function, fashion, and affordability. The main collection holds notebooks with screens up to 15.4 inches, has two main interior compartments with a zippered document pouch nestled in between, plus interior and exterior pockets to hold items such as a cell phone, checkbook, or cables. The imitation leather is easy to clean, and the metal feet on the bottom add extra protection.

Rosemont bags come in seven festive colors, including Pumpkin, Pink, Cherry Royale, Black And Tan, and Avocado. The Rosemont Rio collection

adds four more colors: Tropic Blue, Pepper Red, Carnation Pink, and Mocha Brown. And for \$10 more, you can buy the Rosemont XL, which holds notebooks with 17-inch screens and has wider straps, which tend to be more comfortable on your shoulder.

At these prices, you can afford a Rosemont in a color for every season.

The Skooba Skin from RoadWired (\$29.95 to \$39.95; www.roadwired.com) is the most unique notebook storage product we've seen. It's essentially a padded envelope (with flip-out handles) that acts as a carrying case or extra protection for your notebook in a bigger bag. Used alone, it's the most uncluttered notebook bag you'll find.

The Skooba Skin comes in three sizes—for notebooks with screens up to 12, 15, and 17 inches—and seven color combinations. ●

information, you don't need to treat the Titanium as though it's a Faberge egg: Liquidmetal casing provides crush-proof protection from more than 2,000 pounds of external force. And the Titanium's retractable USB connector means you don't need to worry about keeping track of a cap.

The Cruzer Micro line of flash drives includes capacities of 512MB (\$39.99), 1GB (\$59.99), 2GB (\$99.99), and 4GB (\$199.99). Although these drives lack the Liquidmetal casing of the Titanium, they do have U3 technology and a retractable USB connector.

A smaller, stylish alternative to the Cruzer is Apacer's Handy Steno AH123 (\$49.99 for 1GB; www.apacer.com). Given its 5mm width, you won't mind slipping it into your jeans' pocket or purse. But its metallic red color is worth showing off, so you might want to attach the Handy Steno to a keychain or carry it with the included strap.

Earphones

When you buy an MP3 player, you're paying for the player, not top-quality earphones. So after a while, you may find that buying a better set is necessary. This is one accessory you don't want to buy on the cheap, because excellent sound is worth a higher price.

The hunt for better earphones begins with two companies that specialize in them: Etymotic and Shure. The 6i Isolator earphones from Etymotic (\$149; www.etymotic.com) are known for their ability to eliminate outside noise. Designed for the Apple iPod and other MP3 players, 6i Isolator earphones come with a 5-foot cord, shirt clip, and carrying pouch, plus two styles of eartips to help you get the best fit. They are available in black or white.

E2c earphones from Shure (\$109; www.shurestore.com) are also known for

their ability to isolate outside sounds. Available in clear or black, these earphones, originally designed for professional musicians, work much like earplugs. Because they so effectively block outside noise, the E2c let you listen to music at volumes low enough so as not to damage your hearing.

Home-Theater Systems

A home theater, complete with a flat-panel TV, needs a sound system to match. Yamaha's DTX-CS800 home cinema system (\$549.95; www.yamaha.com) is designed to blend with flat-panel TVs. The 5.1-channel receiver has an integrated five-disc DVD/CD player

capable of MP3, JPEG, DivX, and WMA playback. The system includes two 3-way front speakers with tabletop stands, one 2-way center speaker, and two 2-way rear speakers.

The comparably priced Sony HT-7000DH home-theater system (\$499.99; www.sonystyle.com) also has 5.1 surround-sound technology and a five-disc DVD/CD player. The receiver is XM satellite radio-ready and has an HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) connection, which gives you HD digital video and audio playback through a single cable.

Shopper's Rush

We have a friend who keeps a gift drawer at her home. Whenever she finds a good deal on something she knows someone else will like, she buys it and tucks it in that drawer for future gift-giving purposes.

We don't imagine you'll buy a \$500 home theater system to keep in the box "just in case." But the practical and affordable items mentioned here can be tucked away in your mental gift drawer. At these prices, you're sure to get a shopper's rush no matter who you're buying for. **PG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

Affordable Desktops

In households where notebooks are the main computers for adults, you may need an affordable PC primarily for your kids.

Gateway's new back-to-school eMachines fit the bill. Each of the five new models (\$349 to \$539 after rebate; www.emachines.com) is ready to run the upcoming Windows Vista. The top-end model, the T6536, is loaded with XP Media Center 2005 and has an AMD Athlon 64 3800+ processor, an Nvidia GeForce 6100 graphics card, a 250GB hard drive, 1GB of DDR memory (which can be expanded up to 4GB), and a dual-format DVD burner.

The new eMachines come without monitors, but you can buy one separately on the eMachines Web site (\$269 and less after rebate). ●

shelf watch

Sony DPP-FP35 Digital Photo Printer
\$99.99 • www.sonystyle.com

With the money you save on all of the budget-friendly devices and accoutrements we've mentioned, you can pick up the remarkably inexpensive DPP-FP35, Sony's latest budget-priced dye-sublimation digital photo printer. And talk about quick: When connected to a Sony Cyber-shot camera, expect to see vibrant 4x6 prints in 75 seconds; if you hook the printer to your PC, your pictures print in a speedy 64 seconds.



Editor's Top 5

Favorite Budget-Friendly CE Devices

BY KATIE SOMMER



1 Creative Zen Nano Plus (512MB \$59.99; 1GB \$69.99; www.creative.com). This tiny MP3 player is a great value for those of us who aren't interested in carrying our music libraries wherever we go. The 1GB model can hold up to 500 songs (perfect for a long road trip), and battery life is excellent, even with the LCD. The features that I think set it apart from the more popular models in this price range are the included sport arm band (handy for housework and gardening, too) and the FM tuner.

2 Kodak EasyShare C530 (\$119.95; www.kodak.com). A 5MP digital camera for less than \$120? You read right. This camera lacks optical zoom, and the LCD on the back is fairly small, but it does have video capability, and I like the on-camera cropping and color modes, too. It's perfect for those of you who are looking to invest in your first digital camera but don't want to break the bank, and at this price, you can



Most of us don't have piles of money to spend on whatever we want, but we also insist on getting the most out of our dollar, especially with big purchases such as CE products. Here are *First Glimpse* editor Katie Sommer's Top 5 CE devices that combine value and function.

afford to give it to your teenager when you graduate to something a little more professional.

3 Acme Made Slim Small Laptop Tote (\$79.99; www.acmemade.com). I love all the beautiful laptop totes that are made specifically for women, but even I have to admit that some of them are a bit pricy. You can snag Acme Made's Slim Small tote for less than \$80, though, and you're able to choose from six colors, too (my favorites are the Ballistic Red and Ballistic Green). I especially like how this tote is so slim that you can fit it in another tote or briefcase for more protection, or you can use the removable shoulder strap to sling it over your shoulder and strut confidently right into the month's most important business meeting.



4 Sony Portable DVD Player DVP-FX810 (\$199.95; www.sonymstyle.com). It's very hard to find a name-brand portable DVD player under \$200, but this one from Sony is an excellent value for any family. The screen size is a bit small (only 8 inches), but we love how it swivels and flips for just about every viewing angle you can think of.

The battery life is superb at 5-1/2 hours—more than enough time for a couple of movies on a domestic flight. Pick up a case (an excellent budget-friendly one is Targus' Mini Sport Case [\$19.99; www.targus.com]) that lets you hang the player from the back of a driver or passenger seat, and you're on your way to a relaxing vacation.



5 Vizio P50HDM 50-inch Plasma TV (\$1,999; www.vizioce.com). This is the most inexpensive plasma TV I've seen in the 50-inch category. Although the P50HDM doesn't come with an HDTV tuner or CableCard slot, the contrast ratio is excellent (10,000:1), and I also love the PIP (picture-in-picture) option and various video inputs. It has a 170-degree angle of vision, so the whole crew can get a good view of the game during your weekly Monday Night Football get-togethers. Even the pickiest of homeowners would love to have the gorgeous set mounted on her family room wall, but she can also set it in her entertainment center with the included 12-inch stand. **FG**





Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

CE Gifts On A Budget

BY MARTY SEMS

1 Skin That Player

So your budget won't allow you to give your niece a new iPod, but you can certainly add some color and protection to the iPod she has now. Buy her a skin or case from Designerskins (www.designerskins.com), Marware (www.marware.com), or others. Just make sure that you know which type of gizmo she has. For instance, her iPod might be an iPod nano, mini, or shuffle, each of which differs in size and shape. And then there's the color choice: Take a look at her shoes, purses, clothes, and even her car to get an idea of the colors she prefers.

2 Case The Joint

Along the same lines as a music player skin, you could give your best friend a carrying case for one of her bigger CE devices. Notebook bags range from classy briefcase models from Mobile Edge (www.mobileedge.com) or LowePro (www.lowepro.com) to wild, outdoorsy backpacks from Everki (www.everki.com) or Duluth Trading (www.duluthtrading.com). The trick is to buy a bag that's big enough for the diagonal size of her laptop's screen.

And if she's a shutterbug, she might appreciate a new case for her digital camera. See "Digital Studio Shopping Tips" on page 52 for our camera case shopping tips.

3 Blank Media

With all the standalone DVD recorders and memory card-to-CD photo devices on the market, some folks go through a ton of blank discs. Feed their addictions with fresh DVD-R, DVD+R, or CD-R media from Verbatim (www.verbatim.com), Imation (www.imation.com), or Sony (www.sonystyle.com). A great alternative or companion gift is a pack of new disc cases, such as Maxell's Double Slim Line CD Jewel Cases (\$14.95; www.maxell-usa.com). These can replace the broken cases in someone's media collection and protect discs that came on bulk spindles.

4 Cleaning & Fixing

DVDs and CDs inevitably get scratched and dirty over time. Give someone an inexpensive repair kit, such as Aleratec's DVD/CD Disc Repair Plus (\$39.99; www.aleratec.com), to polish out minor

scratches that can cause skips. There are also cleaning kits with fluids and/or cloths that are safe to use on plastic discs, such as TDK's CD/DVD Clean-Wipes (\$4.96 online; www.tdk.com). And no DVD or CD user should be without a player cleaning disc, such as Memorex's CD/DVD-Player Laser-Lens Cleaner (\$9.99; www.memorex.com).

5 The Gift That Keeps On Giving

He loves his home theater and HDTV, but he still likes to read up on the latest offerings. She can't live without her Treo, but she has her eye on the new smartphones on the horizon. Why not give them both subscriptions to *First Glimpse* (starting at \$12 per year; www.firstglimpsemag.com)? From tips on what to buy to advice on how to get the most out of what they already own, they'll find it in *FG*. Also available are *Smart Computing* (\$29; www.smartcomputing.com) for plain-English computer talk, *Computer Power User* (\$29; www.cpumag.com) for die-hard PC enthusiasts, and *PC Today* (\$29; www.pctoday.com) for the mobile device lover and business traveler. **FG**

Digital Studio Shopping Tips

Protect That Camera With A Case

BY MARTY SEMS

If you're too afraid to take your wonderful digital camera anywhere because it might get scratched, it's time to shop for a quality camera case. Tear out this page and take it with you as you shop.

You don't have to spend much to get a reliable, decent-looking camera case, nor does a huge price tag necessarily mean higher quality. Look for a balance of function and form. It's easy to clip a low-buck case's stray threads, but if they indicate unraveling seams, you don't need the hassle—or the extra expense when it finally comes apart. Zip the zippers and snap the snaps several times. Are they easy to use? Do they operate smoothly? And if your clients or boss will see your camera bag on a regular basis, it might be worth a few extra dollars to buy something classy.

Cases come in all sorts of sizes. Some are small, form-fitting affairs that do little more than wrap a point-and-shoot or D-SLR camera in a protective layer. These are perfect for taking to a party or barbecue. Other cases are roomy enough for accessories so you can sightsee all day.

Extra batteries can be heavy, so you don't want them to bounce around in your case and possibly damage your camera. Hence, the pockets in a potential case are important to check. Do they have elastic, snap, or Velcro closures to keep batteries and memory cards inside? Are the pockets conveniently located? Can you access at least one pocket without opening the whole case? Also, if you need to carry several lenses for your D-SLR, plus lens cleaning tools, a recharger, and a portable flash unit, look for a professional-level bag.

Outdoorsy types know the value of a camera case that will protect their cameras. But urbanites know that the concrete jungle is no picnic, either. Ample padding and a hard shell will help a case protect camera equipment when thrown into a car trunk, dropped on a curb, or knocked off the security desk at the airport. Some cases are splashproof, meaning they can keep out rain. Others are waterproof and made to float. Look for one that fits your needs.

Nature photographers reach for backpack-style camera cases from sources such as Lowepro (www.lowepro.com). When they dive underwater or drive into a sandstorm, however, they may fit their cameras with special watertight casings, such as those from Nexus America (www.nexusamerica.com).

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ What's the price range?

- ☐ A pittance ☐ An investment ☐ OMG

☐ How much does the case hold?

- ☐ Just a point-and-shoot camera
☐ A D-SLR
☐ A camera plus a few accessories
☐ Everything but the kitchen sink

☐ When will you use the camera and case?

- ☐ Day-to-day storage and use
☐ Social occasions ☐ All-day sightseeing
☐ Professional shoots, such as weddings
☐ Hiking into the back country
☐ SCUBA diving

☐ What level of protection does it offer?

- ☐ Unpadded nylon or leather
☐ Soft padding ☐ Hard sides
☐ Splashproof ☐ Waterproof

☐ What kind of strap?

- ☐ Wrist lanyard
☐ Belt loop
☐ Shoulder strap
☐ Backpack harness

☐ Notes

CUT HERE

Part 3 Of 3

Become A Digital Camcorder Pro

You've Shot Your Video—Now What?

During the previous two months we have covered strategies that anyone with a digital camcorder can use to improve the quality of her home video. We've addressed shooting techniques, lighting considerations, and various hardware add-ons.

So you've taken all that to heart and shot the best footage of your life. What next?

Make The Transfer

Sure, you can store your MiniDV cassette, DVD-R, etc., footage on the medium itself, and, of course, you can connect your camcorder to your TV whenever you want to watch it, fast-forwarding through stretches when nothing happens. But why would you want to, when you can do so much more?

To polish and share your production, not to mention create backup copies, you'll need to get the footage into your computer. There are a couple of basic ways to do this:

Video capture. This is your sole option if you shoot to MiniDV cassette. First, you'll need to connect your camcorder and computer. Your digital camcorder probably has a high-speed jack, either USB 2.0 or FireWire (also known as IEEE 1394 and, on Sony units, i.LINK). It should also have come with a cable to plug into the corresponding port on your computer.



Next, set up your video-editing software to import and then play the cassette in the camcorder. The drawback is that it's a real-time transfer. Got an hour of video? It'll take an hour to import.

File transfer. Some camcorders already store video as a data file. If you're shooting to a recordable DVD, you can pop it into your computer's disc drive. Assuming the drive is compatible with the disc (some older drives may not recognize rewriteable formats), you can simply copy the file onto the hard drive.

An increasing number of camcorders, such as JVC's GZ-MG27 (\$700; www.jvc.com) shoot to a built-in hard drive. This is the most convenient transfer method yet: After you have connected the camera, you can copy over large amounts of footage all at once.

Time To Create

Before you commit to anything, review your raw footage a few times. Make notes of what you want to keep or scrap and whatever ideas come to mind for how you want to piece things together.

One silly example: In Part 1, we mentioned shooting a day trip to the beach. Let's say that, before you left home, someone remarked that she hopes it doesn't rain, and some know-it-all emphatically responded that it won't. Now, suppose it rains! You may have the idea to insert, immediately after the know-it-all's weather report, a quick flash-forward to the downpour.

Video-editing software uses a precise time code to keep track of where you are in your footage. As you're reviewing and brainstorming, be sure to include the time code in your notes so you can pinpoint things you want to come back to.

Editing programs are also based around a timeline or storyboard interface, in which you arrange easy-to-manage,

Our Top 5 Favorite Video-Editing Programs

Not even the world's most brilliant filmmakers regard their raw footage as anything more than a good start. For maximum storytelling impact, video needs to be edited. These programs will let you trim out the dull stretches, add special effects, and more. Naturally, professional-level programs provide the most tools, but these would be overkill for all but the most demanding users. So, we'll mainly confine this to scaled-down versions of professional editing programs and other applications that won't set you back \$1,000.

Adobe Premier Elements 2.0 (\$100, Windows only; www.adobe.com). Adobe, which makes Photoshop, packs a wealth of tools into a highly user-friendly workspace.

Apple iMovie HD 6 (\$79 with iLife '06 suite, free with new Intel Macs; www.apple.com). If you're a Mac user, this may be all the editor you'll ever need. It's easy to use,

packs a lot of creative options, and integrates with other iLife programs such as iDVD, for burning your finished movie to disc.

Apple Final Cut Express HD (\$299). If you're ready for more advanced options, including compositing multiple video layers, this is the logical next step up from iMovie.

Avid Liquid 7 (\$694, Windows only; www.avid.com). Avid's video applications are industry standards, especially on PCs. This one is definitely for serious videographers, and its Pro option (\$999) includes a hardware hub with a variety of ports for connecting extra video gear.

Sony Vegas Movie Studio+DVD Platinum Edition (\$129.95, Windows only; www.sonymediasoftware.com). Only \$40 more than the basic edition, this adds color correction tools and includes audio effects plugins and a loop-based music creation program for soundtracks. ●



Sony Vegas Movie Studio+DVD
\$129.95
www.sonymediasoftware.com

Editing Tips

Editing video is just as much an art as shooting it. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you switch from shooting to post-production.

- Remember what we stressed in Part 1: You're telling a story. Even if it's home video, rather than a scripted tale, your creative decisions should still advance the story.
- Resist the temptation to burden your video with a bunch of special effects. Just because your editing program provides them doesn't mean you have to use them all. If you do use effects, use them sparingly, so they stand out more.
- The same goes for showy transitions between scenes. Most of the time, a quick, simple cut or dissolve gets the job done without calling attention to itself.
- If you want to share your video from a recent family vacation, keep it short and keep things moving. Even when they know and love you, viewers who weren't there tend to find extended epics a chore to sit through.
- To keep things visually interesting, combine a variety of shots in one scene. This starts when you're behind the camera, by shooting from different angles. Still, that's just the putty. Now you get to mold it, piecing together shots for narrative flow and storytelling impact.
- The pros know that specific types of shots accomplish specific storytelling tasks. Wide shots excel at establishing the scene/setting. Medium shots focus attention on individuals or small groups. Close-ups are ideal for conveying individual reactions, humorous asides, and one person's side of a conversation.

That's the great thing about digital—you can try something a dozen different ways without locking yourself into any of them.

Like any other creative endeavor, working with digital video (both behind the camera and at your editing station) requires lots of practice before you really hit your stride. Fortunately, practice can be a lot of fun. **FG**

short clips in any desired order. So, when you have a good overview of what you want to do, snip your master footage into clips—complete scenes, individual shots, etc. Trim away pointless pans, zooms, and other camera meanderings and delete these scraps.

Give the keeper clips descriptive names so you can identify them at a glance. As for clips you're not sure you'll ever use, drop them into a folder so they're out of the way but still available in case something proves valuable later.

Finally, with your notes to go by, start experimenting to see what works. That's the great thing about digital—you can

try something a dozen different ways without locking yourself into any of them.

To make the editing process easier, you might find it helpful to work on a specialized keyboard, such as Bella's DV Keyboard 3.0 (\$129.95; www.bella-usa.com). In addition to the normal, everyday keyboard features, it has jog/shuttle wheel and two programmable specialty keys, so you can scroll through video frames more smoothly and precisely than you could with an ordinary mouse.

BY BRIAN HODGE

shelf watch

Sanyo VPC-HD1a Xacti
\$699.99 • www.sanyodigital.com

This remarkable little HD media camera combines the functions of a digital camera with those of a camcorder. You can capture 1,280 x 720 pixel resolution footage of your soccer player's latest goal with HD video at 30fps and then snap a still picture of the victorious team using the 5.1MP digital camera component. The HD1a Xacti's sticker price helps you hold to your budget, too.



Want Prints?

With So Many Photo Printing Options,
Which One Is Right For You?



Miscellaneous gifts from
Kodak EasyShare Gallery
• www.kodakgallery.com

With so many different options, what's a girl to do? Before you decide, look at the benefits and drawbacks of each. Keep in mind that there's no one right answer for all your printing needs, and you can always switch from one to another depending on your needs at the time.

Print & Grocery Shop At The Same Time

Most retailers that offer digital photo processing can make prints from your memory card, a USB flash drive, or a CD/DVD. When using a digital media card, use the DPOF (digital print order format) option in your camera's playback mode to mark the pictures you want printed. On other media (USB flash drive, CD/DVD) put your images in a single folder so the retailer can identify the pictures you want printed.

Photo kiosks offer a slightly more economical, but often more time-consuming, onsite option. Check with your store to see if it does any color balancing as the print is going through the lab; it's often better to let the professionals take care of color management than try to do it yourself.

Free-standing photo kiosks allow you to do the same as the countertop models, but they deliver your prints on the spot; use a credit card to pay for them. You may spend a little more for the convenience, however, so compare the prices if you're planning on printing a lot of photos.

Print quality at these kiosks is generally good, although there are two things that can make a difference. The first is

Back in the day of film cameras, getting photo prints was simple because there was only one choice for most of us: drop off the film at a local store, choose the size and number of prints, wait a week, and go back and pick them up. With digital cameras, however, things have changed. Not only can you drop off your digital "film" (media card, USB flash drive, or CD/DVD) at a photo retailer, mass merchant, or even a drugstore to be printed, but you can also use a store's photo kiosk, upload images to a Web site and have them mailed to you, or print them at home.

whether the monitors are well-calibrated, which is why it's usually better to let the lab professionals adjust color balance. A monitor that isn't calibrated well can lead to color distortion, and you might mistakenly correct the color on an otherwise fine photo. The second is how well the inks/chemicals are maintained. You might want to try printing a couple of test images first before you commit to a large batch of prints.

Our Favorite Photo Web Sites

Storing, sharing, and printing photos from Web sites is becoming more and more popular. These Web sites' prices are usually highly competitive (on average 19 cents or less), but check shipping rates, which can substantially increase your total. Most online stores, such as Kodak EasyShare Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com), also offer free online photo sharing, online printing, and an array of fun and interesting photo gifts.

You'll have to register on the site and, in most cases, you'll have to download special software to upload and edit your images. Uploading images is easy but sometimes time-consuming; consider sites that let you upload more than one image at a time, such as Winkflash (www.winkflash.com). The software generally has only basic image-editing capabilities, but you can always tweak your images with a program such as Adobe Photoshop Elements (\$90; www.adobe.com) before you upload them. Most sites, however, only allow you to upload JPEG images. A few sites, such as Smug-Mug (www.smugmug.com), charge a fee for their online galleries (prices start at \$39.95 per year), but these are ad-free and allow you to upload non-JPEG images so you can use the highest resolution files for large prints.

We haven't found much difference in the quality of prints between sites such as Kodak Gallery, Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com), or Winkflash because they all



Epson PictureMate Deluxe Viewer Edition • \$199.99 • www.epson.com

utilize either Kodak or Fujifilm processing. But, we must admit, we were pretty impressed with the matte print and white border options from Winkflash. And finally, as always, make sure you read the site's agreement policy carefully; at Kodak EasyShare Gallery, you must make one purchase every 12 months to be able to share your albums.

Digital Darkroom At Home

Printing your photos at home—whether you have a fancy setup with a large-format inkjet printer or a small, standalone dye-sub printer—is a mixed bag. It's often the most convenient and

most immediate, and it may be the most flexible printing option, depending on what equipment you have.

For a quick and easy way to print, you can bypass the computer and print either using PictBridge or a media card slot, if your printer has either of these two features. But even if some cameras and printers allow you to perform some image editing (removing redeye, lightening an underexposed image, putting a frame around the picture) on the device itself, these functions are limited compared to the types of editing you can do with software on your computer. You generally can't print much larger than 4 x 6 inches, either.

Some printers, such as the Canon Selphy CP-710 (\$149.99; www.canon.com), are a bit more versatile; you have a small selection of papers from which to choose, including a greeting card set (\$32.99).

If you're looking for versatility and control, consider using a computer and a wide-format inkjet printer (which will print larger than 8x10) like the Epson Stylus Photo R1800 (\$549.00; www.epson.com), which lets you make prints as small as 4x6 inches and up to 13 x 44 inches on a wide variety of paper (including canvas and watercolor paper) in black and white or color. It even comes with a roll paper

holder: Just attach the roll holder to the printer, load it with a roll of paper (just like you do with a roll of paper towels), and print a long strip of 4x6 prints.

We're fortunate to live in an era where there is really no wrong way to get your photos printed. When choosing how, decide on how much time, effort, and money you're willing to spend. **PG**

BY THEANO NIKITAS

shelf watch

Canon DC22 DVD Camcorder • \$699
www.canon.com

If you're in the market for a digital camcorder, consider the new Canon CD22. We love how it records directly to 3-inch DVDs, which you can watch in most home DVD players, and it also features 16:9 widescreen recording. New in this model is a 2.2MP CCD sensor that lets users multitask and take still photos, too. A 10X optical zoom, Canon's popular Smooth Zoom Control feature, and an excellent color filter round out the highlights of this family-friendly digital camcorder.



Some Of Our Favorites

It's hard to choose a favorite photo printer because there are so many great ones, but for portability, ease of use, and print quality, we'd have to go with the Epson PictureMate Deluxe Viewer Edition (\$199.99; www.epson.com).

For online photo ordering, we like Kodak Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com)—ordering prints is quick and easy, and we like its photo gifts and customer service. We also like the site's online sharing capabilities.

The largest photo chain in the country, Ritz Camera (www.ritzcamera.com), has set up comfortable "photo bars" in its stores so you can relax while you're sorting through your images and ordering prints. You can also order prints online (www.ritzpix.com) and pick them up at your local Ritz Camera store in as little as an hour.

Service	Cost per 100 4x6 prints (standard)	Cost per 100 4x6 prints (special)	URL
Kodak Gallery	\$15 plus \$7.49 shipping or \$1.49 order fee	N/A	www.kodakgallery.com
Ritz Camera drop-off	\$29	\$25 to \$27 with Frequent Foto Club Membership	www.ritzcamera.com
Ritz Camera Freestanding Kiosk	\$35	\$33 with Frequent Foto Club Membership	www.ritzcamera.com
Ritz Camera Photo Bar Kiosk	\$29	\$19 with prepaid DigiPrint Card	www.ritzcamera.com
Ritz Camera online	\$19 plus \$10 shipping	1-hour in-store pickup as low as \$19 with prepaid DigiPrint Card; \$25 with Frequent Foto Club Membership	www.ritzpix.com
Shutterfly	\$19 plus \$4.99 shipping	\$15 (when you prepay for 200)	www.shutterfly.com
Snapfish	\$12 plus \$5.89 shipping; pickup at Walgreens also available	N/A	www.snapfish.com
Winkflash	\$12 plus 99 cents shipping	N/A	www.winkflash.com

Photography Technique Tip

Your Camera's Flash



Using a fully automatic mode, the camera detected plenty of background light in this photo and assumed a flash was unnecessary. Unfortunately, shadows covered the subject's faces and ruined the shot.



By forcing our camera's flash to fire, we were able to eliminate the shadows in the previous photo.

The majority of people with digital cameras are casual photographers who prefer to shoot in an automatic mode out of convenience. Even though some pictures turn out fine using such a setting, bad lighting will inevitably ruin a few. If you've taken pictures of your family standing on the beach at sunset, you know all about these unusable photos damaged by shadows that hide the faces of those you love. To avoid such a picture, the obvious answer is to use the flash on your camera to add light and flush out shadows.

However, many outdoor settings, such as the beach, are a problem for the automatic flash mode in many cameras. Your camera will not fire the flash because it thinks there's already plenty of light. It isn't entirely wrong: There probably is enough light in the

background to illuminate most of the picture. The problem stems from the fact that the light is coming from the wrong direction. Most outdoor light comes from the top, side, or back, which tends to create shadows, darken eye sockets, make noses appear larger, and produce other unattractive effects. By using your camera's flash, you are able to add frontal lighting, which in turn evens out the facial features of your subject and helps avoid shadows.

Some digital cameras will allow you to turn on the flash without switching out of a fully automatic mode. Other digital cameras may require you to use a custom mode, such as the Program Auto Exposure mode (often denoted by a P), which is similar to a fully automatic mode in that it allows the camera to select the appropriate aperture and shutter speed values so you don't have to mess with changing those settings.

Once your camera is set to an appropriate mode, look for a button labeled with a lightning bolt icon. This button will control the flash setting for your camera. Depending on your camera, you may need to cycle through a few flash settings before you reach the "always on" setting.

Any time you take a picture using a flash, make sure you're standing within the flash's effective range. The maximum flash range varies with every camera, but a safe flash distance for most is 6 to 9 feet. If your camera has a fill-flash and a full-flash mode, choose the fill-flash mode if your subject is within 5 feet. Fill flash adds light to a photo, but shouldn't be the primary source of light in your picture. Fill flash is best used to lighten shadows and add additional light during the day or in bright locations. For indoor or nighttime photography when other light is unavailable, use full flash. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

When you shoot a photo without enough light, you may not realize that at the time. You'll know it later, though, as soon as you see the print.

Our photo editors can help . . . to a point. They can throw a little artificial light on the subject and

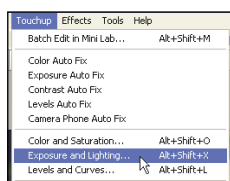
reveal some of the obscured detail. They can't work miracles, however. The detail has to be there in the first place. If you'd hoped for an intimate portrait and got nothing more than a dark silhouette, the shot is probably a lost cause. But if you can tell that you have something to work with, it's worth a try.

These lighting features generally work best on close-ups and other shots without much depth of field. And, as you can see from this month's sad models, sometimes your subject is better left in the dark!

Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

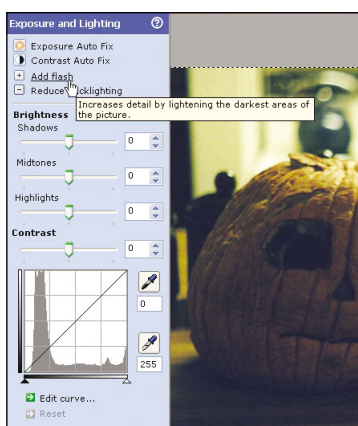
1

Click the Touchup menu and select Exposure And Lighting.



2

To try a quick fix, click Exposure Auto Fix or Add Flash in the task pane. If either one helps, great. However, we find that their effect is rather weak. Fortunately, the sliders provide a lot more manual control.



3

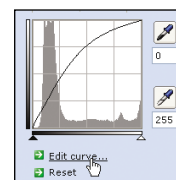
First, drag the Shadows slider to the right. This lightens the darkest pixels in the image. Don't go overboard with it. You don't want the photo to look washed out at this stage.



Now drag the Midtones slider to the right. This alters the overall brightness. You can be more aggressive here,

and if the photo begins to look washed out, that's OK. We'll address that in the next step.

4



Now increase the Contrast. This will return some vibrancy to the photo. It may take a lot of experimentation to reach a happy medium, and you may need to click Reset a few times. Even if you don't end up with the shot you'd hoped for, it can still be better. For further control, click Edit Curve.

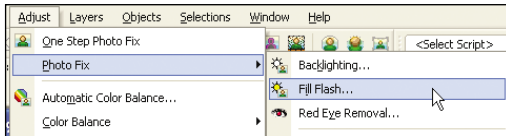
5

This will let you adjust the histogram levels, as demonstrated in our August 2005 installment of "Know How" (page 58), and bring out individual color channels.

6

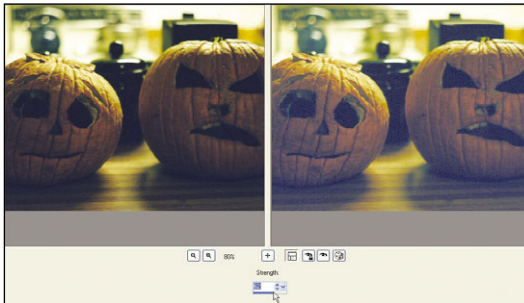
Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

1



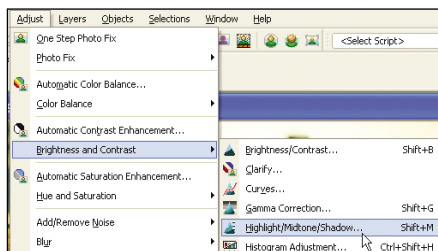
The options in PSP are similar to those in DIP. Click the Adjust menu, select Photo Fix, and choose Fill Flash. This opens a small workbook, so click the Maximize button for a wider view of the Before and After panes.

2



Adjust the Strength slider until you're happy with the effect.

3



If that doesn't do the job, click Cancel. This time, under Adjust, select Brightness And Contrast, then Brightness/Contrast, and maximize the window.

4



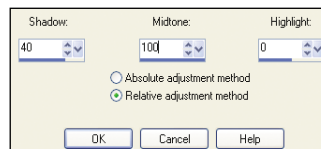
Adjust the Shadow slider to lighten the darkest pixels in the image. Don't go overboard with it. You don't want the photo to look washed out at this stage.

5



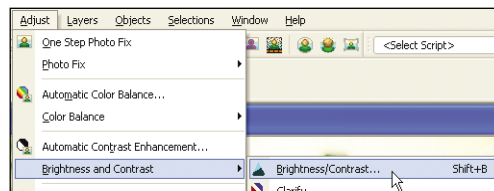
Now drag the Midtone slider to the right.

6



Again, experiment with the sliders. If the Relative Adjustment Method default doesn't yield results you like, try switching to the Absolute Adjustment Method.

7



Click OK. Return to the Adjust menu, select Brightness And Contrast, then Brightness/Contrast. Again, maximize the window.

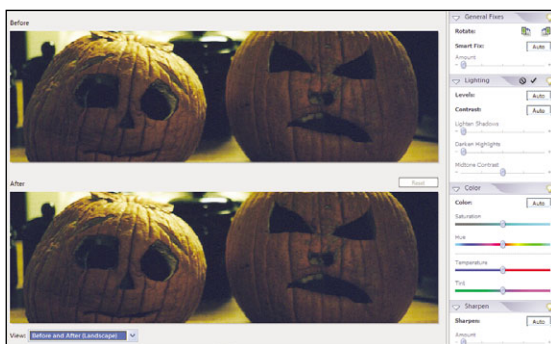
8



Start from zero and increase the Contrast to give the photo a bit more vibrancy; fine-tune Brightness as needed.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

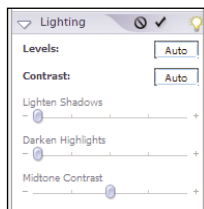
1



Open your photo in Quick Fix and select a Before And After view. Unlike our other two editors, PSE doesn't have a one-click Flash option. It does, however, have the same controls for the three brightness ranges of pixels.

2

In the right-side pane, you'll see a palette for Lighting. (If you'd rather work in full-screen mode, switch to Standard Edit, open the Enhance menu, and select Adjust Lighting, then Shadows/Highlights. You'll be accessing the same controls.)



3



Drag the Lighten Shadows slider to target the darkest pixels in the image.

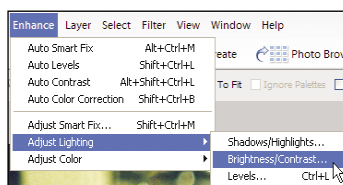
4



Now increase the value for Midtone Contrast.

5

Switch over to Standard Edit view. Click the Enhance menu and select Adjust Lighting and Brightness/Contrast.

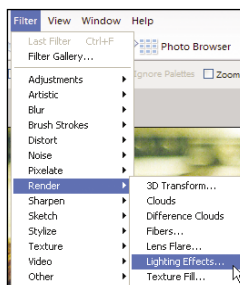


6



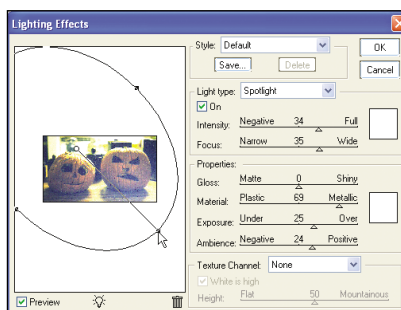
Boost the Contrast to give the photo more vibrancy, and fine-tune Brightness as needed.

7



PSE also has a lighting feature that has no counterpart in the other two editors. In Standard Edit view, click the Filter menu and select Render, then Lighting Effects.

8



There are too many interactive controls than we can get into here, but they're worth playing around with.

For instance, leave Style on Default, set Light Type as Spotlight, and click-and-drag the handles surrounding the photo thumbnail to create directional lighting enhancements.

tips

Photographing
Landscapes

1

**What's More Natural
Than Natural Light?**

Take photos at different times of the day, especially dawn and dusk, to catch the beautiful variety of natural light. Orient yourself so that the light falls at an angle on the scene you are shooting, so you get the contrast of shadows. Drive or hike around a particular scene to shoot it from different vantage points. If your camera lets you, try different lenses, such as a gentle fisheye lens that can broaden the field of view. Also, sometimes scenery can look fantastic in silhouette, as when the sun or moon is setting behind a starkly black forest.

2

**Turn A Vista Into A
Panorama**

Some photo-editing software lets you “stitch” together photos of different parts of the same scene, so you can make a panoramic picture of images taken side-by-side. To do this, set your camera on a tripod for steadiness and take a photo. Turn the camera a little, say to the 1 o’-clock position on a clock face, snap another shot, and so on. This is a neat trick to get a long, horizontal shot of a mountain range, for instance. You could also print enlargements on a large-format color printer and then wallpaper a room with a 360-degree panorama of the view from your favorite spot on Earth.

3

**Big Format,
Better Pics**

Always take landscape photos at your camera’s highest quality setting, meaning its uncompressed RAW file format, if your photo-editing software supports it. Your photos will take up a lot more memory card space, but they’ll be much, much sharper and better looking in large prints. And if you find that you want to blow up and keep just a small portion of a photo—such as a bald eagle soaring through the enormous canyon you shot—it won’t look as fuzzy or jagged as it would if you enlarged it from a low-quality image. If the RAW format isn’t an option for you, high-quality JPEG or TIFF files from a camera with 3MPs or more can look very good, too.

4

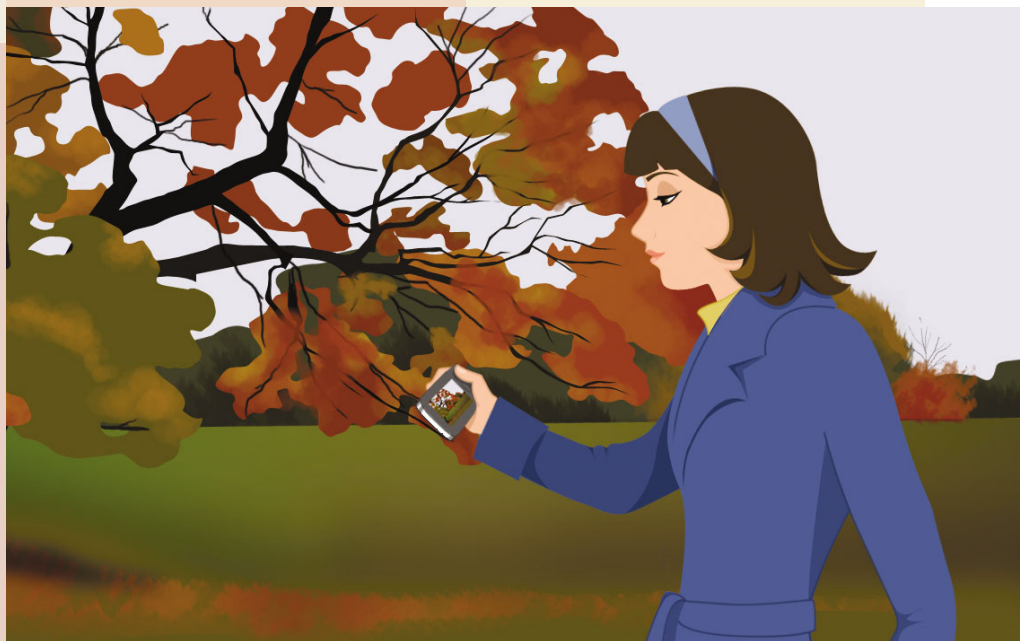
**Think Like Ansel
Adams**

Take some time to learn how to frame a photo with good composition, and you’ll quickly set your landscape photos apart from more amateur efforts. The Rule of Thirds recommends that you keep eye-catching objects in the lower, upper, or side third of a photo instead of right in the center. Also, experiment with including objects in the foreground, such as a flower or fencepost. This will give your photos perspective and help a viewer feel as if she’s standing where you stood when you took the pictures.

5

Practice

There’s no denying it: The best way to snap consistently good landscape photos is to take a lot of shots. Get out and about. Visit interesting places, whether that means national parks or the rural countryside within driving distance of your home. Also, familiarize yourself with all the features of your camera. Experiment with its settings, starting with its manual, outdoor, and portrait profiles, until adjusting your camera to get the look you want becomes second nature to you. Don’t forget to keep your lenses clean.



BY MARTY SEMS

At Home With iHome

These iPod Accessories Pump Up Your Player's Power



iHome iH5 iPod Clock Radio • \$99.95 • www.ihomeaudio.com

W

omen love their iPods.

In the much-discussed "Girls Gone Wired" survey commissioned by

The Oxygen Network, women said they would prefer a little white iPod more than a little black dress.

iPods aren't adored just because they look great. They also sound great and are a convenient, fashionable way to play your digital favorites while working out and commuting.

To get the most from your iPod, however, you need a way to enjoy your tunes even when you don't need your earbuds or when your iPod needs recharging. In short, you need a device that pumps up your iPod at home.

Meet iHome Audio (www.ihomeaudio.com), a company with a lineup of products compatible with the iPod. The iH5 iPod Clock Radio (\$99.95), available in white or black, and the iH36 Under the Counter iPod Player (\$99.95), available in white, are more than accessories for the iPod. In fact, these well-designed sound systems look so great, you may think of the iPod as an accessory for them.

Versatile At Home & Work

The first place you'd think to place the iH5 is in your bedroom. Its alarm system gives you the choice of waking to an

AM or FM radio station, your iPod's tunes, or a buzzer. Plus, the Gentle Waking mode gradually increases the volume of any of the alarm modes you choose. The Sleep mode works with the iPod and both AM and FM radio stations, so you can drift off with music, the news, a baseball game, etc. We also like how the easy-to-read digital display can be dimmed for nighttime use.

But to say that the iH5 is meant only for the bedroom is to sell short this versatile clock radio. With sound this good (see the "Reson8 Is The Reason" sidebar), you can use it in any room in the house or take it to the office.

This clock radio also runs on two AA batteries, which are included. In case of a power failure, the battery backup automatically will take over so you'll have the correct time and access to news and information through the radio.

A slim remote, about the size of an iPod nano, is included with the iH5—yet another feature that increases the number of places you can use this radio. Use the remote to control both radio bands, iPod track selection, and volume. The remote also includes a Snooze Mode so you can silence the morning alarm without reaching for the radio itself.

Conversely, you don't have to use the remote, because on top of the iH5 you'll find clearly marked buttons and dials to

Reson8 Is The Reason

How loud can you stand your iPod?

We're not suggesting you insert the earbuds and crank the volume. Your hearing is too precious for that.

But we turned up the iH5 and iH36 to the highest volume level and couldn't believe what we heard. No distortion. No fuzz. Both music and radio programming stayed as crisp and clear sounding as they did at the lowest volume.

Reson8 is the reason. iHome's trademarked Reson8 Sound Chamber technology minimizes vibration, thus delivering sharp sounds at even the highest level. And the bass levels are very good, too, at all turns along the volume wheel. ●

control all settings, from tuning to a station to dimming the display.

The only consideration in terms of placement is with the unit's AM antenna. The iH5 comes with an FM antenna already attached, and an AM antenna—slightly larger than a credit card—which you'll need to plug in to the iH5. For optimal AM listening, you may need to place the AM antenna up

to a foot away from the radio, so allow for enough space for that configuration.

Dock & Charge

Adding to its versatility is the fact that the iH5 works with all docking iPods. It comes with inserts for the iPod mini, "thin" iPods (such as the third-generation 20GB model), "thick" iPods (such as the fourth-generation 40GB and photo iPods), and the iPod nano. Pads are included for use with fifth-generation 30 and 60GB iPods. The inserts are very easy to install and remove—a gentle push and tug is all it takes. Once the insert is in place, you position your iPod in the dock.

The dock also works as a charging station for all docking iPods. A line-in jack is included so you can attach the unit to non-docking iPods, such as the shuffle, other MP3 players, or other electronic devices, such as a CD player. However, non-docking iPods and other devices will not charge when used with the iH5.

Kitchen Companion

Under-the-cabinet radio units are nothing new. But one that can charge and play your iPod, all while keeping you company in the kitchen, is worth notice.

iHome addressed lots of details with the design of the iH36. One of the first

Smart Setup

We love the convenience of clock radios, but sometimes they are a chore to set. You know the drill: hold down the Time button while simultaneously pressing the Hour or Minute button. (And don't go past

your wake time, or you'll have to start all over.)

iHome's clock players are a cinch to set. They come preset to the Eastern Standard Time, so the minute you plug them in they will display the

accurate time, EST. If Daylight Saving Time is in effect, just use the DST switch on the back of the unit to move the clock forward an hour.

If you live outside of the EST zone, press and hold

the time zone button on the back. Wait a moment for the unit to begin displaying the various zones and then turn the setting knob to select the correct one. ●



things we noticed is the place on the back panel for the AC cord to wrap around so you won't have the excessive length dangling down from your cabinet. There's plenty of cord if you need it; but if you can plug it in close by, then the cord wrap-around on the back panel keeps the unit tidy.

Mounting hardware and instructions are included with the iH36 as are three AA batteries, and if you have troubles installing it, you can refer to a video with installation instructions that is available at www.ihomeaudio.com. Like the iH5, this kitchen player will revert to battery operation should electrical power fail.

Fluid Mechanics

Press a button on the front of the unit, and the docking station of the iH36 emerges and then descends from the unit. "Thick" iPods don't need an insert to dock and play in the iH36, but the mini, "thin," and nano units do, and rubber pads are included for use with fifth-generation iPods. As with the iH5, the inserts are easy to swap out—a consideration if you or your family has multiple styles of iPods you want to use with this player.

The mechanics of the docking station are impressive. You'll be tempted to press the button a few times just to watch how smoothly the unit opens and closes. Should the station ever get stuck or otherwise not respond to the open/close button, use the iH36's manual release tab on the docking station.

iPod shuffle users get special treatment. Because hooking up a shuffle with a separate line logistically wouldn't work with an under-cabinet unit, the iH36 includes a connection for the shuffle on the underneath side of the player. Despite its separate docking location, the shuffle, just like the other compatible iPods, will charge while attached to the iH36.

Radio, TV & Weather

Many of the iH36's features are the same or similar to the iH5 clock radio. Both employ the same great sound technology, and both have an easy-to-use time-set feature (see the "Smart Setup" sidebar).

In addition, the iH36 comes with a battery-operated remote with a magnet on back so you can place it on the fridge for

convenient storage. The player has an FM band, weather channels, and a TV tuner, through which you can listen to broadcasts from your local TV networks (channels 2 to 13). If you don't have time to sit down and watch Oprah, Dr. Phil, Ellen, or another favorite talk show host, you can listen to them on the iH36.

The unit also contains 16 preset buttons (eight for the FM band, four for TV channels, and four for weather channels), and a cooking timer, which you can set up to 120 minutes. As we said, iHome thought through a lot of little details.

And if you're concerned about keeping the iH36 clean in the kitchen, don't be. According to a company spokesperson, all you need to do is wipe down the player with a soft cloth moistened with water and mild soap.

Strings Of Pearls

If it's true that women prefer iPods to little black dresses, think of the iH5 and iH36 as strings of pearls for that little black dress. Once you see how these players dress up your iPod, you won't want to be home without them. **PG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

CE@Home Shopping Tips

Buy A Home PC

BY MARTY SEMS

Even as new gadgets take on more PC-like functions, such as smartphones that surf the Web, there are still plenty of reasons to buy a desktop or laptop computer. Here's a tear-out page you can take with you as you shop.

The way you want to use your PC will tell you which parts are worth more of your money. If you like to make home videos, invest in a faster CPU, such as a 2.8GHz processor instead of a 2.2GHz. Skip the Celeron and Sempron chips, too, which aren't robust enough to seamlessly handle video editing. If you create CDs or DVDs, opt for a 16X model instead of an 8X. A sharp LCD monitor will fit more easily on a small desk than a bulky CRT. In addition, an ergonomically designed keyboard and mouse can make your wrists feel better as you work than would the cheapies included in the base price. Making good choices now can make you more productive later.

Do you like to surf the Web as you transfer music to your iPod? Would you like to run a virus scan without slowing down the rest of your computer very much? A dual-core CPU can help keep your PC feeling responsive instead of sluggish. A dual-core chip is literally two processors in one, and those two cores can share the load of the programs you're running. Fortunately, most new computers sold in the next year will have dual-core processors. Some examples are Intel's Core Duo and Pentium 4 D chips, as well as AMD's Athlon 64 X2.

Most PC manufacturer Web sites let you "build" the system you want, which lets you compare prices to similar computers from other brands. Also, a rebate or special offer could save you hundreds of dollars. It pays to shop around.

Windows XP runs fine with 512MB of RAM, but if you want to run Windows Vista, plan on at least 1GB or 2GB. Also, with a higher memory speed, such as 800MHz or 1,066MHz instead of 667MHz, the computer should run a little bit faster.

Consider putting off buying a new Windows PC for a bit. You won't be able to buy a PC with Windows Vista until at least the end of this year, although some manufacturers may offer easy upgrade plans if you buy a WinXP system before Vista is available. Also, it will be a while before Windows PCs will be able to play HD video at its top quality setting. Instead of potentially making two investments (one now and one later), try to get by with what you have until these big changes are implemented.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ How speedy is the processor?

☐ 2.6GHz ☐ 3GHz ☐ 3.8GHz

☐ Which operating system does the PC have?

☐ Windows Vista ☐ Windows XP
☐ Windows XP Media Center
☐ Mac OS X

☐ How much RAM is inside?

☐ 512MB ☐ 1GB ☐ 2GB

☐ How much hard drive space is there?

☐ Less than 100GB ☐ 100GB
☐ 300GB ☐ 500GB or more

☐ How big is the monitor?

☐ 17 inches
☐ 19 inches
☐ 21 inches or larger

☐ Notes

Get Ready For Halloween!

Frightfully Fun CE Devices

Look in almost anyone's family photo albums and you're likely to come across a few years' worth of Halloween photos. Who doesn't like looking back on the one day of the year when it's acceptable to wear a blue wig to the office? Halloween is one of our favorite holidays, and we'll show you

how to use all sorts of cool CE devices to make this year's day especially fun and memorable.

Snap Happy

Every parent wants to take photos of their little ghosts and goblins on Halloween night. For high-action shots, make sure to choose a camera with a burst or a continuous shooting mode, such as the Fujifilm FinePix F30 (\$399.95;

www.fujifilmusa.com). This type of mode will shoot several photos in rapid succession, which almost guarantees at least one good result. We also like the F30's i-Flash system, which adjusts the camera's flash to fit the lighting conditions when you're shooting. This feature is especially helpful in low-light situations (such as twilight trick-or-treating) when you need some extra light, but a conventional flash might wash out your photo.

shelf watch

MediaStreet Pure eMotion 128 • \$129
www.mediastreet.com

If there's one problem with keeping loads of digital photos on your computer it's that they're not as easily accessible as they were when we were forced to put them in photo albums.



That's why we love digital photo frames so much. The Pure eMotion 128 has a built-in media card reader, as well as 128MB on-board memory. We love the included remote control and wall-mount option, too. It's a perfect gift for a grandma who loves showing off her little ghosts and goblins in their Halloween costumes.



Fujifilm FinePix F30
\$399.95 • www.fujifilmusa.com

If you have older children, consider sending a digital camera with them during their Halloween night out. Ask them to document their evening—they'll likely come up with some fantastic, candid shots of themselves, their friends, and your neighborhood.

Next, help them print the photos: We love the online sharing and printing site, Winkflash (www.winkflash.com), but you could also use a home printer such as the Epson PrinterMate Express Edition (\$149.99; www.epson.com). Then give them an empty scrapbook, some cardstock, a pair of scissors, and some glue and let them go wild creating their very own keepsake scrapbook of Halloween photos. If your kids are more comfortable using the Internet and a computer, show them how to use Scrapblog (www.scrapblog.com), a free online scrapbooking service. Scrapblog lets you create virtual pages with your own photos and fun, customizable embellishments. The kids can share their creations with their friends and family when they're done.

Party Time

Halloween may be second to only New Year's Eve in terms of how many people throw parties, and don't let all that fun go undocumented. If you're hosting a Halloween party, set your digital camcorder (we love the Canon DC40 [\$899.99; www.canon.com] because of how small, unobtrusive, and easy-to-use it is) on a tripod in an out-of-the-way corner. Print out a sign that gives simple instructions on how to operate the camcorder—don't get any more complicated than how to turn it on or off. Then, ask all of your guests to tape themselves, sometime during the night, describing and showing off their costumes. Later, edit the footage, burn DVD copies for everyone, and mail them in a festive orange jewel case for a fun little souvenir of the party.

Don't forget to film your little ones getting ready for trick-or-treating, either.

Scary Movies Available On HD DVD & Blu-ray Disc

The technology is new, so the choices are slim, but there are movies that you can buy in HD that are perfect for coying up with the whole family on a scary night in late October. As always, parents should view movies before their children do to be sure the material is age-appropriate. Here are our favorites on both HD DVD and Blu-ray disc.

HD DVD

"Van Helsing"
(available now)

"The Phantom Of The Opera"
(available now)

"The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow"
(available now)

Blu-ray Disc

"Brothers Grimm"
(available late October)

"Haunted Mansion"
(available late October)

Try to tell a story through your video: A series of relatively short clips of your kids getting dressed, putting on makeup and wigs, going door-to-door, and surveying their loot at the end of the night makes a much more interesting home movie than asking them to simply model the costumes in the family's living room.

Scarier Scary Movies

Halloween is a great time to indulge in a few scary movies, and what better way to watch all the frightful fun than with an HDTV? Choose one with a wide angle of vision, so everyone gets a good seat: We especially like the Sharp AQUOS LC-45D40U (\$3,999.99; www.sharp.com) 176-degree angle of vision for big get-togethers like these.

Many television stations will broadcast scary movies at this time of year, so

check with your cable or satellite provider to see if you can catch a good one in HD. You can also invest in your own HD player, such as the Toshiba HD-A1 (\$499.99; www.toshiba.com) or Samsung BD-P1000 (\$999.99; www.samsung.com), and rent or buy movies in HD, though there is a limited selection from which to choose (see the "Scary Movies Available On HD DVD & Blu-ray Disc" sidebar above).

A Definite Treat

Whether it's a new digital camera, a digital camcorder, or a gorgeous HDTV, you're sure to find something CE-related that will make this Halloween especially fun and memorable for your entire family. Happy haunting! **RE**

BY KATIE SOMMER

A Safe Home

Peace Of Mind With A Monitoring System

You've locked the doors and windows, turned off all necessary appliances, and arranged for a neighbor to watch over your house while you're away on vacation. Now you're off, ready to enjoy every minute of your relaxing beach-filled holiday. But what do you do if you get a sneaking suspicion that something's not quite right at home while you're miles away? If you have a home monitoring system, you could pull up a live video feed to make sure everything is OK using your cell phone or laptop's Internet connection instead of bothering your neighbor.

In addition to monitoring your home while you're miles away on a trip, a home monitoring system can reduce your worries on a daily basis: Use a system to make sure you turned off the iron before leaving for work or use it to check to make sure the kids made it home from school safely.

Home monitoring systems vary greatly from one product to another. To get a better feel for what's available today, we compared some of the most popular systems on the market. Here's a closer look at three systems we especially liked, ranging from basic setups to those that are more comprehensive.

Monitoring & More

One of the basic pieces of many home monitoring systems is a video camera that provides real-time feeds to show you what is happening at home. Not all cameras are alike, however. Some are compatible with wireless networks, and others are multifunctional. We could go on with various options and features available for different video cameras, but instead, let's look at one camera that particularly caught our eye.

One of the key features of the Creative Live! Wireless security camera (\$149.99; us.creative.com) is its ability to detect motion. We can set this camera to monitor a particular room in our home (say the main entryway) and alert us if the front door opens or something else moves.

The Creative Live! Wireless security camera can also email you when it senses movement. When the kids arrive

Creative Live! Wireless
Security Camera
\$149.99
www.creative.com

home from school, the camera in the main entryway can email you an image to let you know they're home. Using Creative's included secure, lifetime hosting, you can also view images from this camera on the Web.

When you're home, use the camera to add live video to an Internet chat session on Yahoo! Messenger and other popular instant messaging programs. You can also use the Wireless Server base station to transfer music, video, or other files from one computer to another by plugging a compatible USB flash drive in to the server and accessing your Web site.

Check Your Home's Vital Signs

Some of us may be content with a few wireless cameras to monitor our homes

while we're away. Others, however, may want a system that can check for water problems, turn off lights, or remind us to change the furnace filter.

Eaton's Home Heartbeat (www.homeheartbeat.com) monitors the vital signs of your home. Just as a nurse checks a patient's vital signs by testing certain things, the Home Heartbeat monitors doors and electrical outlets, tests for the presence of water, and more without actually "seeing" inside the home. Instead of using a video camera, the Home Heartbeat system relies on a base station, a Home Key device, and wireless sensors. Eaton's Home Heartbeat Starter Pack (\$174.99) includes a Home Key, Base Station, and Open/Closed

shelf watch

Logitech Wireless DJ System • \$249.99
www.logitech.com

Have you ever wanted to listen to the music on your computer as you fix dinner in the kitchen? Of course you have. That's why we love the Logitech Wireless DJ System, which lets you stream music from your PC to any stereo in your home using Logitech's Music Anywhere software. The included remote with a backlit LCD lets you navigate your music collection from different rooms, and it also has a cool feature that lets you create playlists without interrupting the current track.



Sensor. Other accessories range in price from \$24.99 to \$150.

The Home Key is a portable, wireless display that informs you of what's going on at home by communicating with the base station. You can customize your own monitoring package with the sensor add-ons: choose from water sensors, open/closed sensors, power sensors, reminder sensors, and attention sensors to create a system to fit your home and lifestyle.

When you leave your house and travel out of range of the base station, the Home Key will capture a snapshot of the current state of your home so you can check it to see if you left the toaster on or the garage door open. If you want to receive alerts if something changes while you're away, the Call Me Awareness feature can send you emails or text messages to warn of potential problems.

A Gateway For Your Home

If the previous two home monitoring options we've mentioned leave you wanting more, look for a system that can give you the best of both, combining the ability to monitor your house using live video feeds with other helpful features.

Our Pick

Although he may look cute and cuddly, Sparky has a big bark. Even if he can't tell us what happens while we're away, the noise he can create may be enough to deter would-be intruders. Plus, what other home security system will return your love and affection? ●





Xanboo's M-Station Gateway starter kit (\$199; www.xanboo.com) comes with an IP camera and Xanboo Gateway base station. This kit became available for purchase online in August and should reach retail shelves in the final quarter of this year.

You can also customize your package by purchasing accessories for the starter kit. The new Gateway base station is compatible with all Motorola homesight products (www.motorola.com). The homesight lineup includes accessories that can sense motion, temperature, and water and can monitor when a door or window has been opened. Other homesight accessories include a power controller and a siren. There are more than 20 accessories for the Xanboo Gateway ranging in price from \$20 to \$100.

Home Monitoring Necessities

Because there are so many options for home monitoring systems, it's hard to know what you really need. Although every kit has its own requirements, most kits require a few things before you can begin setup. Here's a closer look at some of the basics.

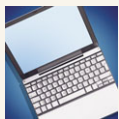
What You Need

Why You Need It



Cell phone with data plan

To access information and photos from your monitoring system



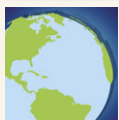
Computer

To set up the system and, in some cases, to monitor live video feeds



Email account

To receive alerts when something at home changes



High-speed Internet connection

To transmit video feeds and other information to the Internet so you can see what's going on at home from anywhere



Router

To allow your home monitoring system and other computers to access the Internet simultaneously

To use the Xanboo Gateway and IP camera, you'll need a computer, broadband Internet connection, and a router. If you'd like to access the IP camera from your cell phone, your phone must be Java enabled or Verizon Brew compatible. Java and Verizon Brew are two platforms that enable your phone to view the camera using a Web connection. Not all phones support this functionality, so it's a good idea to make sure yours does if viewing the camera from your phone is important.

Find A System That Works For You

Although we only mentioned three home monitoring systems, there are many others available to fit any home or budget. If you're not quite sure what you want in a home monitoring system right now, look for a system that is expandable and can give you greater options in the future as your life changes. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

Kids & Technology

Gradeschoolers & Personal CD Players



Cars personal CD player
• \$39.99 • www.disneyshopping.com

Pediatricians and parents alike can testify that newborn babies love the sounds of music. Kids never lose that love; it's just that their taste in music changes as they get older.

One of the fun things about having children or nephews and nieces in the preschool and early grade school years is that their taste in music is pretty simple. They like anything that they can jump, dance, and bounce to.

To encourage your young child's love of music, consider buying her a personal CD player. Owning and taking care of a personal player and a few CDs is good preparation for a child who later may want a more expensive (and more complicated) MP3 player.

Features To Look For

A typical CD player for kids is very affordable, has just a few features to control, and touts the face or form of a popular cartoon character. Even though the character may be the only aspect of the player that your kid cares about, there are three features you should consider when selecting a CD player.

- **Earphones.** What type of earphones—headphones or earbuds—does the player have? Both types have pros and cons.

Earbuds can wrap around the player for easier storage than headphones. However, headphones, if the player's volume is kept on the lower end, are easier on a child's hearing. In-the-ear

earbuds can do more damage to a person's hearing than headphones, according to research conducted last year by a Northwestern University professor (www.northwestern.edu/univ-relations/broadcast/2005/12/players.html).

Decide which style of earphones is most suitable for your child's age. Regardless of which style you choose, teach your child to keep the noise level at a minimum.

- **Anti-skip protection.** A CD player's advertised "anti-skip protection" doesn't mean the player is like a flash-based MP3 player, which have no moving parts and thus cannot skip. A CD player does have moving parts and needs anti-skip protection to prevent the CD from starting and stopping when it's jostled or bumped.

The seconds factored into a player's anti-skip protection—such as 45 or 60—refer to the length of data the player's memory buffer can store. If the player does skip, it will keep playing the song for the stated number of seconds before the motion affects the player's audio. The longer the anti-skip protection, the better, especially with energetic little ones.

- **Power.** All the CD players mentioned below run on AA batteries; some also can be used with an AC adapter. If batteries are the preferred or only power

source, consider buying some rechargeable batteries and a charger, too.

Kid Appeal

You can always count on Disney to roll out good products with plenty of kid appeal—not to mention a tie-in to any Disney movie or Disney Channel program you can think of.

The Cars personal CD player (\$39.99; www.disneyshopping.com) comes with three interchangeable face plates, which bear the images of animated movie stars Lightning McQueen and Mater. The player is compatible with CD-R/RWs and has cool wraparound headphones and 60-second anti-skip protection.

Disney also sells princess- and Mickey Mouse-themed CD players (both \$39.99) with features just like the Cars player, including three face plates.

Like those from Disney, characters from Nick Jr. and Nickelodeon are featured on lots of kids' products. At the Nick Jr. Shop (www.shop.nickjr.com), you can find CD players with mega-popular Dora the Explorer and SpongeBob SquarePants (\$29.99 each). Both have 60-second

shelf watch

Casio EX-S770 7MP Digicam • \$379
www.casio.com

If you're in the market for a family-friendly digital camera, consider the 7MP Casio EX-S770. We love the camera's 35 intuitive scene modes, which ensure that you can switch from shooting a goal during a high-action soccer game to silly sideline portraits and back again with the touch of a button. New for Casio cameras is the EX-S770's 16:9 VGA video mode, as well as a software feature that lets you convert documents and Web pages and view them on your camera's screen. A must-have for any family shutterbug.



anti-skip protection and stereo headphones and both play CD-R/RWs.

The world's most famous feline, Hello Kitty, has a CD player bearing her image, too (\$69.99; www.shop.sanrio.com). It plays CD-R/RWs and has 60-second anti-skip protection, and it also has Skip, Search, and Random play functions. But perhaps the best feature is that this player comes with both headphones and earbuds, which makes it more appealing to older girls.

Most of the players we've mentioned are relatively inexpensive, but for a truly budget-friendly option, check your Sunday circulars. You can often find personal CD players on sale for \$15 or \$20, and even though they likely won't be colorful or character-themed, they'll work just as well. Older kids, especially, would appreciate them.

Music For Kids

Once your child has a personal CD player, you won't lack for gift ideas. Many sites that sell kid-friendly CD players also sell age-appropriate music. At the Nick Jr. shop (www.shop.nickjr.com), you'll find CDs with collections of music (\$9.99 and up) from both the "Dora the Explorer" and "SpongeBob SquarePants" TV programs. The site also sells music from other Nickelodeon programs such as "The Backyardigans," "LazyTown," and "Drake & Josh."

The Disney Shopping Web site (www.disneyshopping.com) sells a good choice of kids' CDs, too, including soundtracks and sing-alongs (\$6.99 and up). We especially like the "The Best of Silly Songs" and the "Artist Karaoke Series: Hilary Duff" CDs. ●



The Gift That Keeps Giving

Used under your guidance, a personal CD player for kids boosts music appreciation, provides entertainment, and keeps the noise to a minimum on long car trips—unless they sing along. Best of all, kids with a CD player are easy to buy for, too. After all, those personal players need age-appropriate music to play (see the "Music For Kids" sidebar). **PG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

tips

Tunes In
Every Room

1

Plan Twice,
Wire Once

Whether you're building a new home or planning a major remodeling project, allot plenty of pre-construction time to planning your whole-house audio. "When it comes to whole-home audio you definitely want to do a good job setting up the system initially and choosing the right distribution parts," say Brian McCullough, factory store manager at Smarthome (www.smarthome.com). "And then the equipment itself can be swapped out when you get a bigger budget later or you are looking for better quality." He recommends that you bring a copy of the home's blueprints to your first meeting with the installer. The installer can use the blueprint to help you determine which components you'll need.

2

Multiple Zones

Many new home models have single-zone home-audio setups that wow visitors who are surprised to hear the music as clearly in the basement as in the living room. If you catch yourself thinking that the people upstairs may not have the same music tastes as the people below their feet, check out multiple zone systems. Installers offer equipment that can break your audio setup into many zones, each of which may include single (or multiple) rooms. You'll find this feature particularly helpful when you have teenagers

3

Speakers

Although you'll want to make a quality wiring job and a well-planned, whole-house-audio layout your top priority, you should also carefully consider the speakers you place in each room. "The best-case scenario is choosing speakers that are directional (that aim toward where you're going to be listening) and that are matched," says McCullough. "The worst-case scenario is speakers that aren't matched, are misdirected, or aren't sized properly for the room." McCullough also recommends a practice known as **timber-matching**. "What timber-matching means is you want to choose speakers that are of the same type or same quality, made up of the same materials so they produce a similar sound," he says.

4

Think Twice
About Wireless

If you're an audiophile, listen to wireless speakers before adding them to your entertainment setup to make sure you're comfortable with the sound quality. Some listeners prefer wired audio because it consistently delivers audio to the speakers. "In some places wireless speakers work consistently, and they're reliable, and in other places they're not," says Crestron spokesperson Jeffrey Singer. "Audio is personal. What sounds great to one person doesn't sound very good to another person. You'll lose a lot of quality with the wireless speakers," says Singer. Keep in mind that although you can buy wireless speakers at any point, you can't easily wire your home for whole-house audio after construction completes.

5

Place Headend
Gear Wisely

The equipment that funnels music from your CD player and other music sources to your house's various zones will require a special location, so be sure to identify a closet or other space that can house these components (the space is often referred to as a **headend**). "A location near the center of the house means that most wire runs will be of approximately the same length," says Rick Gratz, manager of marketing communications for ELAN Home Systems. "This will reduce differences in loudness in different rooms (the longer a speaker wire run is, the greater the signal loss). Easy access is essential for service and updates to equipment. As a large stack of electronics can produce a fair amount of heat, ventilation is needed to ensure optimum performance and longevity of the components."



BY JOSHUA GULICK

music & movies

music

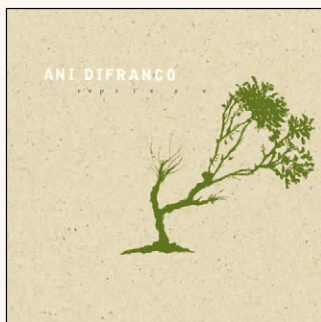
BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

Ani DiFranco

• Available: Now • Price: \$16.98

RIGHTEOUS BABE

[Reprise]



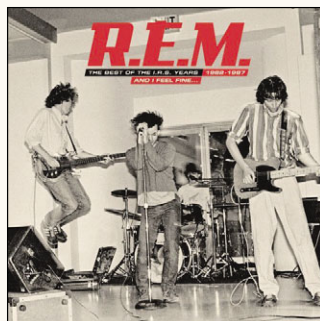
Righteous Babe is the record label Ani DiFranco started, owns, and operates. The label's name also paints a telling picture of why we've admired DiFranco for years. A straight-shooter politically and socially, DiFranco pens lyrics on topics that most musicians wouldn't go near with an army of publicists. DiFranco's music is all about damage—examining, making sense of, and reporting on it from a woman's viewpoint. Starting with 2004's "Educated Guess" through 2005's "Knuckle Down," though, DiFranco has eased away from her street-wise folk and punk roots and softened her approach with more personal, introspective touches. "Reprise" follows in this fashion, as DiFranco and producer Mike Napolitano have created multilayered tunes that churn with tempting melodies and deeper atmospheres for DiFranco's lyrics. DiFranco recorded these songs in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina forced her to abandon them, only to return days later to retrieve them. Still, there are signs of the destruction she witnessed on the finished tracks. Conversely, DiFranco recently announced she's expecting her first child (with Napolitano), pointing the way to some new beginnings on and after "Reprise." This isn't DiFranco's best or most important work, but it might be her most fulfilling.

REM

• Available: Now • Price: \$24.98

AND I FEEL FINE: BEST OF THE I.R.S. YEARS 1982-1987

[Capitol/R.S.]



The album cover alone gives us chills. Before the boys from Athens, Ga., signed a fat contract with Warner Bros. in 1988, they amassed a loyal audience by releasing album after album of masterful rock steeped in folk, rock, and New Wave sensibilities for the now-deceased I.R.S. Records. REM are better musicians/songwriters today, but the band was never more significant, influential, or as fun as on "Murmur," "Reckoning," and the like. This two-disc set has everything that made REM integral, plus a collector's edition includes handpicked rarities, live and previously unreleased cuts, and more. "Pretty Persuasion" indeed.

For The Kids: Yosi

• Available: Now • Price: \$15.99

WHAT'S EATIN' YOSI?

[Yosi Music]



Straight from Yosef Levin's recipe book comes "What's Eatin' Yosi," 16 food-themed songs that taste scrumptious musically and lyrically. From the Zydeco-fueled "Let's Get Cookin'" to the calypso bounce of "Chilly Chili" to the spacey, electronic vibe of "Schlurpknopf," Yosi expertly slices, dices, and spices these morsels. Kids will especially like "Eat, Repeat," which features The Burping Dads on background vocals, er, burping. The food theme does grow weary upon repeated listens, but musically "What's Eatin' Yosi" is a meal you and your kids can really, uh, bite into.

Owen

• Available: October/November • Price: TBA

AT HOME WITH OWEN

[Polyvinyl Record]



"Whatever it is you think you are, you aren't. A good friend. Unique. Well-read. Good looking. Smart. Now you know." Chicago cult fav Mike Kinsella utters these spite-filled words on "Bad News," the opening cut on Owen's upcoming "At Home With Owen." You'd expect dark, brooding music to escort such a biting attack, but Kinsella drenches "Bad News" and "At Home . . ." with soft acoustic guitars, violins, tasteful drum fills, and a wavering but confident voice. Oddly, the mix of excellent, coming-of-age lyrics and hypnotic melodies leaves you depressed but hopeful.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

"Arrested Development"—Season Three

\$29.98 • RATING: NOT RATED • AVAILABLE: NOW



Sadly, the "best comedy on TV you aren't watching" is regrettably now relegated to the title of one of the best comedies you didn't watch. Michael Hurwitz's brilliant show about the dysfunctional Bluth family never curried favor with mainstream audiences, forcing FOX to pull the plug in early 2006. Season Three picks up with Michael (Jason Bateman, who's had lesser roles in "Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story" and "Starsky & Hutch") desperately trying to hold his riches-to-rags family together while finding love in the unlikeliest of places (we won't reveal his love interest, but let's say it's a monster cameo appearance). Hurwitz and

his team of writers shovel enough multi-layered, intellectual zingers into each episode to fill up an entire season of most sitcoms. Combine it with seasons one and two for a series, albeit dreadfully too short-lived, that's worth watching again and again.

"The Sentinel"

\$29.99 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW



One part "In the Line of Fire" and one part "The Fugitive," director Clark Johnson's ("S.W.A.T.") "The Sentinel" makes up for a relatively predictable plot with thrilling scenes and above average acting. Ageless Michael Douglas ("A Perfect Murder," "Wonder Boys") stars as Secret Service agent Pete Garrison, one of the First Lady's (Kim Basinger of "L.A. Confidential") personal bodyguards. Garrison mistakenly becomes the prime suspect in an assassination plot against the President, forcing his protégé David Breckinridge (played by Kiefer Sutherland who obviously channels his role as Jack Bauer in FOX's "24" for the part) to relentlessly pursue him. Eva Longoria (TV's "Desperate

Housewives") co-stars as Agent Jill Marin, clearly a departure from her day job as Gabrielle Solis. Longoria's performance is passable, but her cast mates more convincingly fill their respective roles: Douglas and Sutherland are tailor-made for this suspense flick.

"Inside Man"

\$29.98 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW

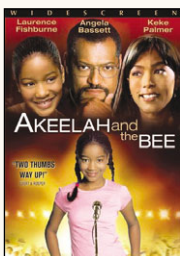


Director Spike Lee ("Malcom X," "Summer of Sam") and an all-star cast of Denzel Washington ("Malcom X," "Training Day"), Clive Owen

("King Arthur," "Derailed"), and Jodie Foster ("Silence of the Lambs," "Contact") team up to make an intelligent, well-acted caper. Owen plays Dalton Russell, the mastermind of what is ostensibly an elaborate bank robbery in the heart of New York City, and Washington stars as Detective Keith Frazier, who must fight against internal corruption charges while trying to bring down Russell. Foster, who plays Madeline White, a civilian negotiator with her own agenda, doesn't seem to fit in with the cast's dynamic, and the film fails to live up to the standards "Dog Day Afternoon" set 30 years ago for riveting heist films. Still, "Inside Man" is a gripping film with a satisfying (and smug) conclusion. Lee fans should watch closely for subtle references to his earlier works.

"Akeelah and the Bee"

\$28.98 • RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOW



Movies such as "Akeelah and the Bee" reaffirm both our faith in the value of education and that excellent, sincere family movies still exist. Following in the footsteps of recent fictional "Bee Season" and the documentary "Spellbound," both of which are based on the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee,

"Akeelah's" follows its title character, Akeelah Anderson (Lauren "Keke" Palmer). With the help of her mentor, Dr. Larabee (Laurence Fishburne of "Othello" and "The Matrix Revolutions"), Akeelah steadily advances through spelling competitions until she reaches *the* spelling bee. Angela Bassett

("Waiting to Exhale," "How Stella Got Her Groove Back") delivers a sensational performance as Tanya, Akeelah's single mother who provides loving support on her daughter's journey. Palmer shows enough talent to be in the same class of wunderkind young actors such as Dakota Fanning and Haley Joel Osment.

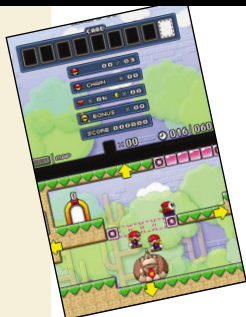
games

for you & the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis

• PRICE: \$34.99



RATING



Nintendo DS

Although Bowser will forever remain Mario's archrival, Nintendo's vertically-challenged plumber seems to have plenty of time in his schedule to resume his similarly long-standing feud with Donkey Kong. In the Nintendo DS sequel to Mario vs. Donkey Kong, you must use your stylus to usher teams of Mini Marios through the game's taxing puzzles. Players can create custom maps for global battles over Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection.

• NINTENDO
• WWW.NINTENDO.COM

Splinter Cell: Double Agent

• PRICE: \$59.99 (XBOX 360)
\$49.99 (GameCube, PlayStation 2, Xbox)



RATING



Multiplatform

As elite soldier Sam Fisher, you must infiltrate a terrorist organization to thwart disastrous attacks on its targets. In this fourth installment of the Splinter Cell series, your actions affect how the plot develops. As a double agent, you must complete missions with conflicting objectives to please both your NSA employers and the unsuspecting terrorist group. Experience the game's stunning scenery as missions crisscross the globe.

• UBISOFT
• SPLINTERCELL.US.UBI.COM

Dance Dance Revolution Supernova

• PRICE: \$39.99



RATING



PlayStation 2

Bring your happy feet, groove thing, and Konami's latest title in the Dance Dance Revolution series to your next Girls' Night In. Dance Dance Revolution Supernova has 100 minutes of music and difficulty settings to tax the best music video background dancer (for the budding Michael Flatley, the game has a Tutorial Mode). With support for online play, you can boogie down with dancers worldwide.

• KONAMI
• WWW.KONAMI.COM

Sunstar Suspending Picture Frame

• WWW.KLEARGEAR.COM/1907.HTML • PRICE: \$19.99

Can your photo frame do this? Turn it on and watch the picture cube rise up and float in midair. For kids, it's a fascinating, educational introduction to magnetism, as well as a fun way to show off their favorite photos of friends, family, and pets. For adults, it's a surefire conversation starter for the office desk. The frame box holds four 2.5 x 3.5-inch photos. It's hanging around at www.kleargear.com/1907.html (\$19.99).



Everki Ascend Guru Laptop Backpack

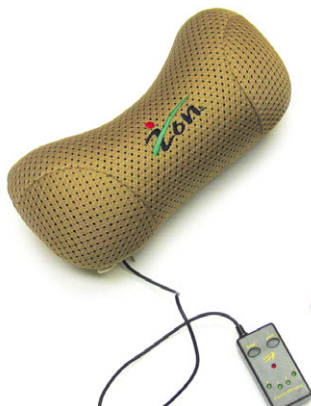
• WWW.EVERKI.COM
• PRICE: \$64.99

You probably know a guy who would rather be hiking mountain trails than traveling for business. Show him that you understand how he feels with this notebook bag in disguise. Everki's Ascend Guru (\$64.99; www.everki.com) is a backpack, but it's tasteful enough for a presentation in the board room. It cushions and protects laptops with up to 15.4-inch screens. It also comes with all the little pockets a notebook bag needs—including one for his Zen or iPod music player. The Ascend Guru comes with flax, charcoal, or blue accents.



IZON Hi-Tech Car Massager

• WWW.BUMPERBIB.COM • PRICE: \$44.95



Traffic congestion can give drivers muscle tension, and that means aches and pains. It's enough to make a person wish for a personal massage right there in the car. If you know someone with a frustrating commute every day, give her this head and neck massager to make her ride slide. The IZON (\$44.95; www.bumperbib.com) fits any headrest and gets its power from the vehicle's 12-volt jack. Its fabric is quick-drying and even antibacterial thanks to a special nanotech coating.

... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

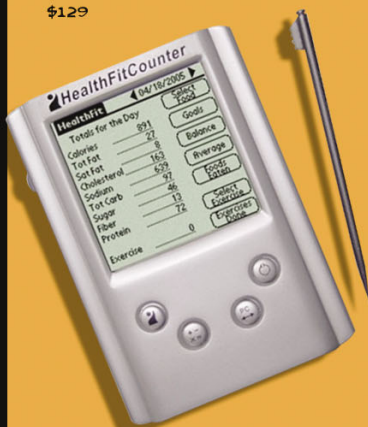
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